

Cold War Books in the 'Other' Europe
and What Came After

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VOLUME 2

Cold War Books in the 'Other' Europe and What Came After

By

Jiřina Šmejkalová



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On the cover: The Čapek Brothers Bookstore, Prague, December 11th, 1989. Photo courtesy of Josef Chuchma.

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To
*Kristina as a tiny reimbursement
for all the time and energy she generously gave away
to these pages ...*

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As they say (and I really mean it!): any mistakes found here in are entirely the result of my own negligence.

Lincoln and Dobřichovice

July 2010

INTRODUCTION

Why tell the story of books under the centrally controlled regimes in the Eastern part of Cold War Europe and after their fall now, twenty years after the censors, samizdat activists, and exiled publishing enthusiasts have gone? Before even trying to answer such a question, another, perhaps equally tricky one, has to be addressed: how to go about telling such a story in the first place?

It seems almost an imperative to begin any narrative on this geopolitical area of the 'other Europe', by complaining about the conceptual fogginess surrounding the study of this region.¹ The question of how to tell the story of books in this region is one part of these conceptual difficulties, which in turn are part of the larger picture of methodology and the closely related discipline of the history of studying this area – regardless of whether we refer to it as the (post)Soviet region or Central and Eastern Europe. It is the context of North American and (West) European scholarship that must be considered, as any book in English on 'totalitarian' books is likely to be read not just as another contribution to the field of book studies but also against this disciplinary background. 'Eastern', 'Communist', 'Soviet', 'Bolshevik', and even 'Cold War', and 'regime', 'system', and 'totalitarian' are concepts frequently used in both academic and popular studies of the region, but individual authors rarely agree on their definition.² If it is difficult

¹ Jacques Rupnik, *The Other Europe* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989).

² The very concept of 'communism' is in itself highly misleading. It has been generally adopted as a label referring to numerous phenomena – a political system, a geopolitical region, a certain type and system of government, etc. According to Marxist doctrine, however, 'Communism' was a stage, the highest desirable level of social and economic development (of a classless society), that would be achieved in a more or less undefined future. Although its attainment was expected, but at the same time continually postponed, not even the most dogmatic ideologues of the regime would have ever claimed that the system 'we were building up' was already ready to be called 'communist'. Katherine Verdery makes a similar point by suggesting that she prefers to use the term 'socialist' to 'communist', for none of the Soviet bloc countries actually achieved the stage of communism. Even though the leading role of the Communist Party was a feature of every one of them, they referred to themselves as 'socialist' republics. See Katherine Verdery, "The Property Regime of Socialism," *Conservation & Society* 2/1 (2004): 196n1. Bradley F. Abrams suggests using the capitalised 'Communist' to refer to the Communist Party and its members and the uncapitalised form to refer to those

to find the right conceptual apparatus for the analysis and interpretation of developments in this region under regimes routinely referred to as 'communist' and even to define it territorially and identify its particular historical periods or political establishments, this is all the more true for the upheavals of the late 1980s and the early 1990s and their aftermath – the 'revolutions' in the region and the subsequent 'post-totalitarian' era. As a leading American Slavist, Michael Holquist, puts it: "The biggest problem confronting the peoples of East Europe, and those in other parts of the world who are struggling to comprehend recent events there, is the question how to interpret the enormity of the disparity between what was and what now is, and the rapidity with which that fissure opened up in history. The problem, in other words, is one of how to find a story that can contain changes so great and so manifold that they beggar all traditional schemes for investing contingency with an aura of necessity."³

There is a consistent lack of consensus among scholars on both sides of the former Iron Curtain with regard to the concepts that have been specifically developed as the tools with which to identify and analyse the Soviet system and the countries under its influence, but on top of this, research on this geopolitical region is also faced with the constraints of what Katherine Verdery calls "the entire conceptual arsenal through which Western institutions and social science disciplines have been defined in this century".⁴ This arsenal continues to shape and determine the knowledge we have of almost every part of the world, including our knowledge of the world's books. Besides this scholarship and the conceptual confusion that plagues it, there are at least two other areas that shape stories about Eastern Europe and thus determine what we accept as knowledge about this region. First, there are the sensational and dramatic media texts that wrote all about the end of the Cold War and related events ('Realm of Evil', 'Velvet Revolution'), and second, there are the emotion-filled personal memories, usually rooted in the very specific, personal experiences that the particular

sympathetic with the communist movements but not members of the Party. See Bradley F. Adams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham: ML, Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 296 n1.

³ Michael Holquist, "Ten Theses on the Relevance of Cultural Criticism for Russian Studies (History, Myth, Biography)," *New Formations. A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics. Postcommunism: Rethinking the Second World* 22 (Spring 1994): 8.

⁴ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38.

narrator had with the establishment ('criminal oppressive regimes' versus 'social security'; 'censorship' versus 'trash-free book culture available for everyone').⁵ Using the discourse shaped by scholarship, the media, and personal experience is even more complicated when it comes to telling stories about anything that can be broadly defined as culture or, as traditional Marxists would have it, the 'non-productive' spheres, which lie more or less outside the immediate reach of the economy and politics.

The question of how to construct the narratives about 'totalitarian' books during and after the Cold War era is made even more complex by the fact that the concepts specifically designed for this regional analysis lack explanatory clarity, general (Western) social-science concepts do not fit well, and journalistic and personal metaphors tend to generate preconceptions, for none of these can be separated from the disciplinary context of this field of study. While it is impossible within the limited space here to re-tell the entire story of the origins and development of the discipline of East European, Soviet and Russian studies, and it is certainly not the main purpose of this book, some basic, albeit simplified, knowledge about this academic sphere would be helpful for understanding some of the arguments raised in this book. For example, Norman Naimark, one of the leading figures in the world's largest professional organisation devoted to this area of study, the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS), noted on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the organisation's founding that the roots of the discipline are connected to the Second World War, when the United States was in desperate need of information on other parts of the world and began hiring academics capable of providing knowledge useful for the decisions being made in the war years.⁶ Mark von Hagen refers to the paradigm of the "'orientalization' of Russia and of Eastern Europe more generally" in the study of this area, generated especially during the late 1940s and early 1950s, at the height of the Cold War standoff between the 'West' and Stalin and his tyranny over the 'East'. This type of scholarship, to which many

⁵ These terminological troubles are also discussed in the introduction to what is to date the most detailed study of 'Communist Eastern Europe' and its transition produced by Czech scholars: Jiří Vykoukal, Bohuslav Litera, Miroslav Tejchman, *Východ: vznik, vývoj a rozpad sovětského bloku 1944–1989* [The East: Origins, Development and Collapse of the Soviet Bloc, 1944–1989], (Prague: Libri, 2000), 11.

⁶ Norman N. Naimark, "On the 50th Anniversary: The Origins of AAASS," *NewsNet* 38/5 (November 1998): 2.

émigré scholars contributed with their “new faith-anticommunism”, adopted a highly essentialising approach to its treatment of Russian traditions of despotism and imperial expansionistic politics, but it was also concerned with Russia, which dominated all scholarly work on the region while other nations stood largely on the margins. There also emerged a new version of ‘comparative despotism’ – totalitarianism – which ranked Stalinist Russia alongside Hitler’s Third Reich.⁷ One could even speak of a kind of ‘Sovietology ghetto’, which was gradually constructed in North American and to some extent also Western European academia, a ghetto carefully safeguarded, while it effectively excluded outsiders, establishing a knowledge-monopoly on issues in this region.

There were various non-academic factors that facilitated this Western intellectual monopoly. It was more or less impossible to conduct field work in the region and primary sources were inaccessible because the Iron Curtain kept researchers out, few researchers were proficient in the (mostly) Slavonic languages of the region, and the funding for some educational programmes and the job market for their graduates were to some extent provided by the intelligence services and driven by their Cold War expectations and demands.⁸ In the mid-to-late 1950s and in the 1960s, things changed, at least at the level of methodology, and, as von Hagen also noted, after Stalin’s death a new stage in the Cold War generated a new paradigm of ‘normalising’ the Soviet experience, which was now recast as a process of modernising backward Russia (and the Soviet Union) to bring it “into the industrial, urban, and technological age”. Some experts within the USSR (such as the dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov) and outside it even predicted a convergence of the capitalist West and a modernising Soviet East.⁹ Von Hagen also refers to the emerging ‘Eurasia anti-paradigm’, which went

⁷ Mark von Hagen, “Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era. Review Essay,” *American Historical Review* 109/ 2 (April 2004): p. 449. Von Hagen also refers to the recent history of the concept of totalitarianism in Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York, Oxford: OUP, 1995).

⁸ Even such basic and generally used terms as the ‘Cold War’ can refer to “quite different periods, processes and events”. See István Király, “Library Secret Fond and the Competition of Societies,” in Hermina G. B. Anghelescu and Martine Poulain, eds., *Books, Libraries, Reading & Publishing in the Cold War* (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 2001). For a recent study of the Cold War era, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 452, 453.

beyond the binary oppositions of the Orient versus Modernisation paradigm and tried to address the shortcomings of both, while appreciating the tremendous changes in the area that the paradigm model dismantled. In addition to the newer versions of this 'anti-paradigm', which redefined ideological notions of an 'enlightened dynamic Europe' and 'backward static Asia', the voices of Eastern and Central European intellectuals have to be considered (i.e. Jacques Rupnik and Milan Kundera, both of Czech origin, living in France) who have substantially undermined the German and Russian imperial narratives that dominated accounts of that part of Europe for much of the 20th century.¹⁰

Nevertheless, one of the effects that the Cold War era political and intellectual dynamics had on methodology was (at least in American scholarship) its overwhelming preoccupation with relatively recent events that could be related to policy issues. For example, Michael Holquist in his reference to American studies of the Cold War used the term 'Kremlinology', often equated with "monitoring the appearance of Politburo members as they jockeyed for position on Lenin's tomb at May Day celebrations in Red Square".¹¹ In other words, a methodological focus on the rulers on the one hand and the opposition they produced on the other, that is, on the very tips of the power-structure iceberg in the 'communist countries', led to the construction of a 'totalitarian' myth. This myth was based on the assumption that the existing power-structure was consistent and stable, and that the countries of the Soviet bloc were condemned to live 'With the Soviet Union Forever!'; as a famous communist propaganda slogan in Czechoslovakia reminded people at almost every turn. The analytical focus on the most visible 'oppressors' and those most 'oppressed', namely, the communists and their opposition, clearly gave rise to binary explanatory schemes. As, for example, the historian Bradley F. Abrams noted in his recent study of the way the Communist Party came to dominate Czech post-war cultural life, "during the Cold War, at least for most American scholars, there was a clear demarcation line between 'us' and 'them'. We stood on the side of those fighting against communism and saw those dissenting from their regimes in Eastern Europe as our allies."¹² Moreover, such an approach often ignored the everyday life of the

¹⁰ Ibid., 454, 457.

¹¹ M. Holquist (1994), 4.

¹² B. F. Abrams (2004), 1.

majority of the population situated away from the peaks of the power structure. Methodologically, this myth left hardly any room for contemplating the social space in between the points of oppression, resistance, and conformity. As a result, the social (and cultural) space between the pole of the dominating power on the one hand and its direct opposition on the other heuristically remained largely marginalised. In addition, as the leading power structure was also seen as generally uniform throughout the region, this generated another myth, about the predetermined similarities assigned to all the countries of the region under the conceptual umbrella of almighty (but weakly defined) 'communism', only occasionally interrupted by a wave of resistance, such as the Hungarian uprising of 1956, Czechoslovak 'socialism with a human face' crushed by Warsaw Pact tanks in 1968, or Polish *Solidarność* of 1981. With the exception of these occasional ruptures, which were again narrated in terms of communists on one side and their opposition on the other, it was also difficult to take note of the major geographical and historical differences between individual countries in the region.

Discursive and institutional developments under the Cold War also resulted in the isolation of this field of study from any potentially 'subversive' theoretical schools or 'fashionable theories', as some experts still call them. There are some literary scholars and historians focusing on this area who still see the infiltration of cultural, post-colonial, and gender studies into their disciplines as their 'trivialisation', in the sense that the research agenda is made subordinate to fleeting political currents, thus undermining the legitimacy and even the very academic integrity of the field.¹³ As a result, the field of Soviet and East European studies showed limited capacity to communicate with and contribute to the debates that were going on in social and cultural theory during the final decades of the Cold War. One of the main consequences of this history was the failure of this field of study to foresee and conceptually and theoretically grasp the collapse, in the late 1980s, of the object of their study – the Soviet empire. Its collapse was as much a shock to the discipline itself as it was to the geopolitical region, and

¹³ This argument was voiced, for example, by several participants – mostly literary scholars – in a one-day conference 'New Trends in Czech Studies II' I organised at the Czech Embassy in London on 10 December 2004 with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Such a fear of the fragmentation of the field's integrity is further supported by a general decline in enrolment in Slavic languages and cultures and the consequent closure of some well-established departments by the late 1990s.

resulted in “the break-up of their discursive paradigm”.¹⁴ It made some leading experts in the field, such as James H. Billington, a former director of the Kennan Institute and the Librarian of Congress, to conclude that: “We are living in the midst of a great historical drama that we did not expect, do not understand, and cannot even name”.¹⁵

The interest in political and economic trends that was largely shaped by the Cold War discourse dividing the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’ made socio-economic and political perspectives prevalent in analyses of this region, a prevalence reinforced by analysts on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The study of language, literature, and other areas of the arts remained separate from the socio-economic mainstream, a fact that had severe consequences for research on cultural or – to put it in orthodox Marxist terms – superstructure issues. While, as von Hagen noted, in the climate of isolationism, as the borders around the Eastern bloc solidified in the 1950s, ‘culture’ was taken seriously, it was regarded as something static and unchanging. Although with the change in the political climate in the 1960s, culture and cultural differences (between the nations of the Soviet empire) began to be perceived as more dynamic, this was still viewed as less important compared to macro-systemic developments.¹⁶ Themes and interests relating to books and printing in general would clearly have been part of this generally marginalising trend, a trend that appeared to continue even once the ‘great historical drama’ was more or less over and the equally confusing ‘transition’ period had begun.

Despite the epistemological scepticism articulated by Billington, or perhaps because of it, the collapse of ‘really existing socialism’ in the early 1990s initiated an explosion of theories and analyses known somewhat pejoratively as ‘transitology’. In *Labyrintem revoluce*, the latest and most systematic account of the 1989 events produced in Czech so far, Jiří Suk, a historian from the younger generation, noted that “it is obvious that a search for central notions, normative concepts and theories, which could acceptably explain the collapse of communism and the complex process of transition of the East and Central European countries towards democracy, remains in the early stages even ten

¹⁴ M. Holquist (1994), 3.

¹⁵ Quoted in M. Holquist (1994), 3, from James H. Billington, “The Search for Modern Russian Identity,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* XLV/4 (January 1992): 31.

¹⁶ M. von Hagen (2004), 450, 453.

years on".¹⁷ Even use of the concepts of revolution and transition to refer to the events and processes of the late 1980s and early 1990s has generated conflicting views and theories and should perhaps be put in quotation marks in order to highlight the ambiguity of their meaning.¹⁸ In addition, transitology scholarship was sharply criticised for being dominated by "neo-liberal and (neo-) modernisationist approaches to transition, both of which assume a universalistic solution to the problem of the transition from authoritarian and centrally planned systems to democratic market economies, emphasize the possibility of societal design, and largely understand the transition as the construction of new democratic market societies *ex nihilo*."¹⁹

The marginalization of culture – both as an object of research and as a possible tool for interpreting and understanding totalitarian and post-totalitarian societies – continued at least until the late 1990s, and it only slowly underwent a 'revolutionary' turnaround. Analyses showing sensitivity to the underlying "historical and cultural legacies that significantly shaped post-communist institution-building, in terms of political systems, culture, economic institutions, and informal norms and values"²⁰ remain, however, on the margins of research on post-1989 developments, and the majority of the scholarship on the

¹⁷ Jiří Suk, *Labyrintem revoluce: Aktéři, zápletky a křižovatky jedné politické krize (Od listopadu 1989 do června 1990)* [Through the Labyrinth of Revolution. Actors, Plots and Crossroads of One Political Crisis. From November 1989 to June 1990], (Prague: Prostor, 2003), 18.

¹⁸ Suk discusses two extreme positions of the definition and applicability of 'revolution' developed over the course of the 1990s (In J. Suk, 2003, 18–20). The first one is represented, for example, by Anthony Giddens, who said that "the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe were definitely revolutions", for they met all three conditions that he defines as constitutive for the concept of a revolution. It must be "a mass social movement" that "leads to major processes of reform or change", and "involves threat or use of violence on the part of those participating". The 1989 revolutions could be thus seen "as the seizure, often involving the use of violence, of political power by the leaders of a mass movement, where the power is subsequently used to initiate major processes of social reform." In Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*. Third Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 502–504. Representatives of the second position argued that the concept of "revolutions" should be reserved for violent, bloody upheavals of political regimes and insist that the events of 1989 were more about "negotiated transitions" between the liberal members of governing circles and the more constructive members of the opposition. The Czech Civic Forum and Polish "round table" have often been cited as an example (see, for example, Soňa Szomolányi, *Kľukatá cesta Slovenska k demokracii* [The Meandering Path of Slovakia towards Democracy], (Bratislava: Stimul, 1999).

¹⁹ Paul Blokker, "Ideas, Culture and History in Transition Studies," *Czech Sociological Review* 40/6 (2004): 869.

²⁰ P. Blokker (2004), 871. Blokker discusses two examples of such 'alternative' approaches to transition. These studies not only challenge the idea of the secondary

regions is still mainly concerned with issues relating to Russia. The ‘transition’ scholarship – at both the regional and the international levels, and the Czech versions of it do not seem to be any exception – has largely remained ignorant of the ‘cultural turn’ experienced in the Western social sciences approximately forty years ago.²¹ A telling example in the Czech context is that the first and so far only thematic issue devoted to culture published by the leading social sciences periodical *Sociologický časopis* only came out in 2004, that is, fifteen years after the Velvet Revolution, to use the term commonly applied to the course of events after 17 November 1989.²²

And this brings us to one of the most remarkable paradoxes of the representation embedded in any story of ‘totalitarian’ culture and its aftermath, and not even the story of books during this period can escape it. While the actual production of knowledge about cultural matters in the ‘other Europe’ (including former Czechoslovakia) has been largely marginalized and fragmented, it could be said that the internationally distributed images of the Czechoslovak ‘Velvet’ upheaval were filled with culture-related motifs. It could even be said that the ‘cultural turn’ that did not take place in the scholarship in this area did take place in the construction of the international public (and medialised) picture of the ‘revolutions’. This picture highlighted the *performative* nature of the revolutionary events, such as the drama

importance of societal, cultural and non-economic manifestations in the post-communist context, but present them as decisive explanatory factors in the transition processes: Frank Bönker, Klaus Müller, and Andreas Pickel, *Postcommunist Transformation and the Social Sciences: Cross-disciplinary Approaches* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) and Grzegorz Ekiert and Stephen E. Hanson eds. *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). I would also add, for example, Daphne Berdahl, Matti Bunzl, and Martha Lampland, eds., *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

²¹ On the rather fragmented tradition of research on culture within the Czech sociological context, see, for example, Miroslav Petrusek, “Století extrémů a kýče. K vývoji a proměnám sociologie umění 20. století,” [A Century of Extremes and Kitsch. On the Development and Transformation of the Sociology of 20th-Century Art] *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 40/1-2 (2004): 11–36. On the methodological controversies accompanying more intense communication between current mainstream cultural theory and Czech research on culture, see Jiřina Šmejkalová, “Cultural Studies, sociologie kultury a “my”. Úvaha mírně metodologická,” [Cultural Studies, the Sociology of Culture and ‘Us’. Somewhat Methodological Reflections] *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 40/1-2 (2004): 77–94.

²² *Sociologický časopis*, 40/1-2 (2004).

students brutally attacked in the centre of Prague on 17 November 1989, the calls for a general strike voiced from the stages of Prague theatres, the meetings of leading figures of the opposition held in theatre buildings, artists and intellectuals organising demonstrations and negotiating with the communist leaders, and so on, and all this topped up by the image of the discursively effective and powerful figure of the 'playwright-president' Václav Havel. Leaving his undeniable historical achievements aside, it could be said that Havel has been assigned more symbolic capital than any other public figure in the Soviet satellite bloc. This capital was accumulated over the course of the late 1980s, through the translations of his work released by major Anglo-American publishing houses, and through the international media.²³

The historical circumstances under which Havel's position as an independent 'political amateur' and an intellectual 'living in truth' reached its limits have been examined in depth by Jiří Suk who noted that "pre-November texts and verbal statements, in which Havel emphasised and justified his distance from politics came into obvious conflict with his activities in the second half of December of 1989. Some of his friends were struck by and bitterly observed his intensified striving for a political post and his application of practices which he used to criticise as a drama writer and essayist."²⁴ But despite the gradual collapse of his pre-1989 ideas and visions over the course of the 1990s, including the merciless politicisation of his originally 'a-political politics', the romanticised construct of the 'president-artist' *de facto* continued to be a key link between the cultural and the socio-political aspects of 'revolutionary' and later on 'transitional' processes. This constructed link became a discursive framework for references even in academic books that examined topics fundamentally remote in

²³ For example, the database of *The New York Review of Books* contains references to thirty-one texts, works either written by Havel himself or to which he had contributed between 1979 and 2002, the majority of which were released in the first post-revolutionary decade. See <http://www.nybooks.com/archives> (accessed 21 September 2005).

²⁴ J. Suk (2003), 241. Havel's definition of himself as someone who "is not an angel or God with super human qualities ... is not a politician who fights for the votes and must please everybody" who "lives in a harmony with one's own conscience" gradually disintegrated in the face of the politicisation of his own position in society. Cited from an interview conducted by Ivan Lamper with Václav Havel for the samizdat periodical *Sport* in September 1989. In Jiří Suk, ed., *Hlasy občanské společnosti 1987–1989* [Voices of Civil Society 1987–1989], (Prague: Československé dokumentační středisko, o.p.s./Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1999), 83–95.

space and time from Havel's actual historical appearance. References to Havel made their way into, for example, James C. Scott's book on power relations in Malay villages and Annabel Patterson's study of literary culture in early modern England.²⁵ But for both Patterson and Scott, references to Havel were used more to illustrate the points that the authors would have made anyway and as such do not really constitute a serious methodological impulse for rethinking established concepts and approaches to cultural issues in 'totalitarian' and 'post-totalitarian' contexts.

This brings us to the other side of the paradox embedded in the representation of the 'East' and its books. Not only have cultural issues – otherwise highlighted in international media discourses – traditionally been marginalised in the study of the Soviet bloc, but cultural topics and themes related to the 'East European' or 'Soviet' region, and so forth, have also been on the whole marginalised in the (Western) mainstream study of culture and the media, including print culture.²⁶ Experts in cultural and post-colonial studies have been attracted by 'struggles' that have taken place within "the context of post-dictatorship, the collapse of revolutionary projects and the new dynamics created by the effect of the mass media and transnational economic arrangements which call for new ways of thinking and acting politically" in Latin America, just to take one example.²⁷ But despite noteworthy parallels between, for instance, the Latin American 'struggles' and the struggles that have taken place in the Eastern and Central European context, there has been lack of corresponding inclusion of

²⁵ Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation. The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

²⁶ The gaps in contemporary mainstream scholarship on culture and media-related matters have only recently been acknowledged by some leading representatives in the field, such as James Curran, who, along with Myung-Jin Park (a colleague from South Korea), noted the 'narrowness' of media studies, characterised by the "self-absorption and parochialism of much Western media theory" and "universalistic observations about the media ... advanced in English-language books on the basis of evidence derived from a tiny handful of countries". James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, eds., *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2003), 3.

²⁷ From the 'Founding Statement' of the *Latin American Subaltern Studies Group*, quoted in Jeff Browitt, "(Un)common Ground? A Comparative Genealogy of British and Latin American Cultural Studies," in Stewart King and Jeff Browitt, eds., *The Space of Culture. Critical Reading in Hispanic Studies* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 68.

these topics in the international academic mainstream, and for the most part the reciprocal isolationism of regional studies and cultural studies (not just in strictly British terms) appears to be continuing.

Similarly, most mainstream studies of books that are available internationally – especially those produced by Anglo-American academia – have largely been based on American, British, French, and to some extent also German sources, but until recently they have not been an exception to the trend of marginalising topics outside these countries.²⁸ Scholars that have focused on the book culture of the French Revolution (Robert Darnton, Carla Hesse, Natalie Zemon Davis) challenged the simplified model of cultural life under an absolutist regime and undermined the notions of ‘oppressed authors’ and ‘deprived readers’ and debunked the image of the ‘censor’ as the main determining factor in cultural production and reception. Nevertheless, much of this work has been done on the history of market-oriented cultures and has rarely been raised in the context of the socialised ownership of the means of cultural production. A few large studies on reading and books in Soviet Russia have also appeared (Dobrenko 1997, 2002),²⁹ but the socio-cultural space of ‘small European countries’ and their very specific ‘totalitarian’ book stories are still largely hidden, at least from the English-speaking world.³⁰

²⁸ For example, Dutch organisers of the 14th annual conference of SHARP (Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing), called ‘Trading Books - Trading Ideas’, which took place in The Hague and Leiden 11–14 July 2006, deliberately included several panels on East European book topics, while at its first, founding conference in New York in 1993, I, along with one colleague from the former GDR, Mark Lehmstedt, were the only ‘Eastern European’ participants.

²⁹ Interestingly, although in a way Dobrenko paraphrases Altick in the title of one of his own books, in an interview with Gian Piero Piretto for *eSamizdat. Laboratorio di Slavistica Creativa*, Dobrenko, in response to the question ‘Do you consider yourself a Cultural Studies scholar?’, said the following: ‘Not really. First of all, because I am interested in particular aspects of culture such as literature, film, cultural policies and so on. Each field has its own methodology. Cultural Studies is something very vague.’ In *eSamizdat* (III) 2-3, (2005): 27–29; <http://www.esamizdat.it/temi/piretto2.htm> (accessed 5 May 2007).

³⁰ For a key work on the history and historiography of ‘small European nations’, see Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 1985). For the most extensive study of the book in Czech to date, see Petr Voit, *Encyklopedie knihy: knihtisk a příbuzné obory v 15. až 19. století* [Encyclopaedia of the Book: Printing and Associated Fields in the 15th–19th Centuries], (Prague: Libri, 2006). This weighty (6 kg, 245/295/70 mm) and richly illustrated volume includes an account of the development of all professional fields related to book production and distribution during the period under observation here

Since there is no straightforward or ‘correct’ answer to the question of how the story of books in the ‘other Europe’ should be told, as any attempt to do so must consider all the conceptual, methodological, and disciplinary difficulties involved, it is at least possible to answer the question of why this story should be told. One reason is the need to fill in the gap in the knowledge pertaining to European books in more general terms. But there are more reasons for doing so, and one of the key interests of this book is to explore the extent to which the study of book-related issues and their representation can help us uncover a story that, according to Holquist, resists established interpretative paradigms. In other words, could a methodological focus on books and on printed matter, or to put it in Darton’s terms, on the printed word “as an ingredient in the happening”, instead of “as a record of what happened”, reveal something new or different about the major European upheavals of the late 20th century, something that may otherwise have gone unnoticed?³¹ Can an account of the various stories people tell about books help elucidate the “great and manifold changes” that are taking place in this region and in doing so raise questions that have not yet been asked in mainstream studies of books and culture?

The study of cultural and, more specifically, book-related issues may more than just complement macro-analyses and may even help to undermine some misleading assumptions about the ‘totalitarian’ and ‘transitional’ social contexts. There are many questions that could be raised by putting *books* at the centre of the research agenda and granting them the status of an analytical category. Along with Roger Chartier, we could ask “...[h]ow are we to understand the ways in which the form that transmits a text to its readers or hearers constrains the production of meaning?” This is a question “radically different from all approaches that hold the production of meaning to result solely from the impersonal and automatic function of language”.³² I take Chartier’s point even further and try to examine how the transformation of the ‘materiality of the text’, its production and

(printing, typography, paper, booksellers, publishers, etc.), but as the titles indicates, it omits the 20th century. It sells for 2500 CSK, approximately one-eighth of the average monthly salary in 2007.

³¹ Robert Darnton, “Introduction,” in Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche, eds., *Revolution in Print: The Press in France 1775–1800* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Ca.: University of California Press, 1989), xiii.

³² Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings. Text, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 1–2.

dissemination, relates to – facilitates, promotes, or obstructs – social and cultural change. Although the basic ideas for this book were developed prior to my encounter with the guru of book history, Robert Darnton, and his work, it was above all his approach and his manner of questioning that helped me to articulate my own focus in examining books in ‘revolutionary’ and ‘post-revolutionary’ societies. Like Darnton, I am less interested in the books that served as vehicles for ‘revolutionary’ ideas and more in the books that were actually produced and read in an era pregnant with change. In other words, rather than asking what books did to people, I am looking at what people have done with books, exploring the techniques behind the material and symbolic reproduction of the printed text, in both official and alternative spheres of textual production, the tools of dissemination, and the patterns of reception. One of my primary concerns and a key source in my research is the way in which the textual representation of a book, that is, the stories people tell about books in both printed and narrated textual forms, is capable of providing insight into the more general issues of the socio-cultural dynamics of a certain period and establishment.

Henri-Jean Martin has suggested that books may “no longer exercise the power they once did; in the face of the new means of information and communication to which we will have access in the future, books will no longer master our reason and our feelings”.³³ But I would argue that – at least within the specific socio-cultural context addressed in this study – the discourses on books (as produced and transmitted within a certain community) conveyed the signals of potential social conflicts and consequently operated as a constitutive part of the social eruptions that followed. Thus a ‘book’ – defined not merely as a mediator of knowledge, meaning, or aesthetic value, but as a complex social institution – is in this study regarded as a sensitive tool with which to identify and even co-construct the processes that underlie large-scale social processes. There are limitations to such an approach. Rather than asking what really happened to books under and in the aftermath of ‘totalitarianism’, all that can be done is to reproduce and interpret the narratives that exist on books in the form of academic accounts, statistical data, archival documents, published and unpublished personal narratives, and media texts. It is also my own experience as a ‘consumer’ of ‘totalitarian’ books and as a reader and writer of those

³³ As quoted in R. Chartier (1995), 13.

that replaced them under the post-totalitarian condition that is embraced in this book. In other words, despite all the effort at objectivity, researchers and analysts of the last decades of the Cold War and its aftermath of my generation cannot fully escape their own intellectual and historical, location cemented by personal experience and memory. As Milan Otáhal, a key Czech historian of the period of the 1970s and 1980s, noted, “research on the period of normalisation is complicated by collective memory and by the short amount of time that has elapsed since that period; historians who work on the topic were themselves part of it and thus continue to work on their own biography, include their own experiences into the analysis. The experiences of researchers and citizens often contradict the results of social science research”.³⁴

One more note must be made about the matter of sources and the development of this project. Originally this project was supposed to look just at the late socialist and immediate post-revolutionary period of book production and reception in the context of the command system. In the course of research, however, it became clear that also necessary was deeper insight into the very origin of the idea behind cultural production in the command system and the practical application of this idea in selected socio-cultural contexts. Not only did the focus of this study continue to develop, but the very object of study, namely, the world of books, has itself been developing rapidly, amidst the rise of new challenges comparable to those identified by Brian McNair in the contemporary Russian media scene. He noted that “changes which took a century of capitalist development in Europe or North America have unfolded in Russia in less time than it takes to research, write, and see published an academic monograph”.³⁵ The quick pace of events gradually turned a study originally intended to rely largely on qualitative sociological research into an account that required the use of archival sources or in other words into an enquiry of an essentially historiographical nature. Not only were ‘the book revolution’ and particular stages of its aftermath rapidly becoming history, but, as I argue in this book, it would have been difficult to examine them without reference to the continuity with the past. Similarly, the research

³⁴ Milan Otáhal, *Normalizace 1969–1989. Příspěvek ke stavu bádání* [Normalisation 1969–1989. The State of Research], (Prague: Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AVČR, 2002), 42.

³⁵ Brian McNair, “Power, Profit, Corruption, and Lies: The Russian Media in the 1990s,” in J. Curran et al., eds., (2002), 79–80.

resources also continued to change. Some major studies were published in Czech and English in recent years which either directly addressed or at least included topics related to command books and cultural production in more general terms, as well as valuable data on their collapse (Abrams 2005; Suk 2003; Halada 2007; Janoušek 2008; Knapík 2002). In this sense, this study, beyond the analyses it presents, also introduces readers to some of the current Czech literature on the topics dealt with in this book, while simultaneously providing a contextual background, which, while perhaps too simplified, is nonetheless more necessary than it would be in a study of, for example, British or German books.

Getting access to some primary sources, especially sources housed in the archives of former state publishers, was also largely influenced by the dynamics of the period after 1989. Some files covered a somewhat extensive period, well outside the era of communist rule, in some cases starting as early as 1898 (Melantrich) or 1921 (Orbis).³⁶ They also included a large variety of (unprocessed and uncatalogued) materials, such as minutes from meetings, personnel files, account books, photo materials, business and editorial correspondence, editorial records of individual titles, and thousands of copies of books from editorial archives, some more relevant for this project than others. Most important, the privatisation and the subsequent liquidation of the state publishers was a complex and lengthy process, so some archives had not yet reached the National Archives by the late 1990s or even the early 2000s.³⁷ In addition, like in the early 1990s, these publishing houses were cutting staff as well as reducing the production of titles and print runs, and they also often changed premises, and not just once, all of which certainly contributed to the fact that by the time their records finally reached the National Archives they were incomplete and in a state that archivists called 'chaotic'.³⁸

³⁶ For information on the National Archives (i.e. a state administration office and a central state archives controlled by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic), see <http://www.nacr.cz/>. Internal materials and further information on the publisher's files were kindly provided by Jan Kahuda, an archivist at the National Archives, who also assisted my research in the NA during July and August 2008.

³⁷ Parts of Orbis's archives were acquired by the National Archives in 1993–1999, the ones of Melantrich in 1997, and the ones of Vyšehrad in 1995–1997; the rest of materials of Orbis, Melantrich and Vyšehrad were moved to the NA during 2002–2005.

³⁸ The descriptions of the files produced internally by the staff of the National Archives offer a telling reflection on the state of affairs in each particular case.

While this book includes references to the former USSR and other countries in the Soviet bloc, its focus is on the Czech book context. It preserves this focus even in passages devoted to cultural matters in former Czechoslovakia, for as many experts on this region would agree, Slovakia represents culturally and historically a rather distinct entity whose identity cannot simply be ignored, despite three-quarters of a century of joint statehood.³⁹ Rather than trying to retell the complete cultural history of one small European country in the late 20th century, this specific socio-cultural space serves here as a frame of reference for examining the making and breaking of an authoritarian socio-cultural system. The book is divided into three parts, which more or less chronologically trace the intellectual and political origins of controlled book production and reception; its theories and practices applied under the centrally controlled regimes; and a discussion of the processes and the actors involved in its turnover and aftermath.

Part One briefly introduces ideas about book production and reception, including some data on basic book-related issues, like the production of books in the world or the literacy rate, in an attempt to argue that the construction of knowledge on books (worldwide) has been more about estimates than exact empirical evidence. The history of books and reading is by no means a linear story, and there is little consensus or reliable information about it, but on top of that the story is surrounded by misunderstandings and myths, which tend to migrate from one study to the next. In Part One some of the main ideas behind

For example, the Komenium files are accompanied by a note suggesting that “due to the large amount of operational materials, their substantially chaotic nature, and the time pressure during liquidation, the retrieval of archival documents was carried out in rather difficult conditions”. Most files are described as ‘fragmented’, ‘damaged’, and ‘with significant gaps’. They are also defined as ‘unprocessed’ and ‘partially accessible’, so there was no detailed catalogue available, and the files could only be consulted under the personal supervision of an archivist. This means that researchers can obtain only a limited amount of information on particular files, searches for concrete documents are limited, and it is a matter of research luck what a researcher ends up discovering in the boxes. To add to this story, during the period when these files would have reached the NA, i.e. in 1995–2001, the National Archives themselves were in the midst of a major relocation process, moving from the historical centre of Prague into newly built premises on the outskirts of town, and as a result, for six years the reading room could accommodate no more than twenty researchers.

³⁹ For a discussion of the specific nation-building problems arising from the distinct histories of the Czechs and the Slovaks, see, for example, B. F. Abrams (2004), 36–37 or Carol Sklanik-Leff, *The Czech and Slovak Republics. Nation versus State* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1998).

attempts to regulate book publishing and consequently readership are summarised. It traces the re-reading of these ideas in the local cultural and intellectual context and examines the ways in which different states in the region, including the Soviet Union, dealt with monitoring the achievements of the cultural and publishing policies in reading research. In Part One I also outline some of the main trends in the Czech, Hungarian, East German, and Polish traditions of research on centrally controlled books and reading, devoting special attention to the development and constitution of the 'Red Model' of publishing and reading in the Soviet context. One of the main conclusions from this account is that book-related research projects – commissioned and supported by communist governments – revealed trends in book production and readership that deeply contradicted the original principles of social revolutions, including the assumption that regulated textual production would inevitably generate equal access to the printed text. In the reading research reports I shall follow references to weaknesses in the command system's management of the 'unproductive superstructure', that signalised, among other things, a major failure of the system of central control as such.

Part Two examines the discursive and institutional practices that shaped Cold War culture and books in the region of Eastern and Central Europe. Conceptual and methodological issues are raised, particularly in relation to the definition and use of the concepts of 'censorship' and 'samizdat', which tend to dominate accounts of 'totalitarian' book culture. I argue that in order to understand the complex dynamics of this culture, we need to move beyond the binary oppositions of the list of *libri prohibiti* on the one hand and a typewriter hidden in a cellar on the other. Following Darnton, Hesse, Hunt, and Zemon Davis, I suggest that without an in-depth analysis of the day-to-day operations of the institutional infrastructure of publishing, bookselling, and reading and the day-to-day *performances* of those involved, it is difficult to understand not just the concept of culture but also social change in general. I further highlight a view shared by Williams, Thompson, and Hoggart that the notion of the 'culture' that books tend to be associated with cannot be reduced to canonical texts that supposedly 'made history', but must instead be seen as a set of everyday social practices. Two chapters in Part Two are devoted to the analysis of the institutional background of the so-called official sphere of centrally controlled book production, such as state-operated publishing houses, book distribution, and bookselling. Despite the malice of the 'censors' and

the heroism of the producers and distributors of samizdat books, it was official book production that actually supplied the majority of the local population with printed matter.

The main aim of communist cultural management was not just to jail rebellious poets but to put books 'into the hands of the people'. By multiplying print runs of (carefully selected) limited titles, it aimed to expand general access to the printed word. However, constraints affecting the number of titles resulted in a constant shortage of the books people really wanted to read and subsequently created fertile soil for the expansion of alternative production, including samizdat and exiled publishing. Using archive sources, Part Two also examines the stories of some of the big state-operated publishing houses and the principles embraced by the most visible sphere of book production in the 'normalisation' period – the literary establishment and some cases on the borderline between the official and unofficial spheres of publishing (i.e. Hrabal and Seifert) it embraced – operated. I borrow the notion of 'performance' (Havel, Butler) in order to add complexity to the simplified notion of 'oppressive censors' and 'oppressed readers' and in order to highlight the day-to-day involvement of all members of the community (including editors, booksellers, readers, etc.) in the reproduction of the command system. This also contributes to the central argument that it was the continually eroding 'performed' stability of the command book system, rather than purely the pressures from alternative production, that created an environment in which both the ruled and (most of) the rulers were ready for change.

In Part Three, I explore the conceptual and institutional background to the so-called Velvet Revolution and the post-communist transition, which is a necessary starting point for my main topic, namely, the transformation of centralised book culture. I examine the privatisation and decentralisation of the socialist book market and its relationship to the main general trends in the socio-economic development of the region during the first post-1989 decade in order to challenge the simplified model of the 'winners' and 'losers' of transition. This leads to one of the key arguments I advance in this section, that the cultural and social impact of 1989 did not take the form of a sudden and unexpected 'revolutionary' change, but was rather a gradual and continual process. I argue that in spite of the rather discontinuous and fragmented development of property relations at the macro-economic level, the area of book production and reception retained a large degree of continuity at the level of the 'performance' of those involved.

My arguments are based on research in the archives of some of the (unsuccessfully) privatised state-operated houses, as well as twenty interviews with the real protagonists of the 'book revolution', mainly independent publishers involved in the process of change between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s (between 1989 and 1992 alone the number of publishers rose from 45 to about 3000). The interviews addressed the circumstances in which the publishing houses were established and sought to elicit responses to issues such as financing, marketing strategies, and editorial and copyright policy. The analysis of the interviews is supported by evidence from the available statistical data on the changes in distribution chains, print runs, book prices, and the cultural behaviour of the population, and analyses of both the local and the international media coverage of the emerging 'post-communist' book markets.

One of the primary objectives in this project was to uncover the continuities in people's performances, which often remain hidden beneath the discourse of discontinuity, commonly used in the representation of the allegedly sharp break with the past and leap into the realm of 'freedom and democracy'. I attempt to lay bare those 'performative aspects' of the protagonists' roles that connect the book cultures 'before' and 'after'. I argue that it is those sets of inherited performances that previously contributed to the erosion of the 'old regime' that are the most resistant to change in the newly established context of 'post-revolutionary' cultural production. Perhaps paradoxically, those inherited performances not only guaranteed continuity with the previous regime, but also made transition possible by preventing the total collapse of the entire system of communication through the printed word.

PART I

THE COMMAND BOOK PROJECT: ORIGINS AND FEEDBACK

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT (TOTALITARIAN) BOOKS?

Books, publishing, and reading have traditionally been the target of regulation. Fears have surrounded the (potentially mass) reproduction and reception of (potentially unwanted) ideas in print ever since pages began to run off the, allegedly first, printing press in Mainz. It may seem like a banal statement, but, consequently, no story of a printed text can ever be fully separated from the social networks in which it was published and read.¹ The ‘sociology of literature’, the roots of which are linked to enlightened works by Madame de Staël, is an umbrella discipline that represents just one possible approach to considering the power of the social pressures and expectations imposed on a printed text. René Wellek, for example, suggested that the “sociological approach to literature is in particular cultivated by those who profess a specific social philosophy”, such as ‘Marxist critics.’² But this does not mean that we can simply make direct connections between theories of the social determination of textual production, intellectual sensitivity towards social aspects of textual communication, the interest in common texts and readers outside the spheres of privilege and literary canons, leftist and Marxist political leanings, and the regulatory and controlling practices exercised over textual production and reception in many parts of the Cold War world. All these areas of theory and methodology and beliefs and practices have their own distinctive

¹ I use the term ‘printed text’ here in order to emphasise, as, for example, Roger Chartier has done, that the form in which a text is transmitted has an impact on both its meaning and on the construction of its audiences, and therefore, the meaning of a text cannot be solely derived from the function of language (R. Chartier, 1995). In this perspective, it is useful to make a distinction between the text (in, say, Derrida’s terms) as any kind of entity suitable for interpretation, the literary text as a form of aesthetically informed textual expression, and the printed text as a particular, historically defined material form of textual production, dissemination and reception, which can take the form of a book, leaflet, poster, etc. The problem, however, is that many of the theoretical accounts that will be discussed in this book do not explicitly articulate these distinctions. In this book, I am mostly concerned with the printed text in the format of a book, the definition of which remains problematic.

² René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin University Books, 1973), 94.

histories and localised variants. Yet, the links among them – some carefully concealed, others brutally blatant – cannot simply be ignored. The making and breaking of the specific system of publishing, selling and reading books that existed in the centrally controlled socio-economic systems of the former socialist countries in the region of Eastern and Central Europe would seem to provide an exemplary, and in a certain sense experimental, space to theoretically explore and practically test such links. Below we will examine the ideas and practices involved in the centrally regulated, command system of book production and reception, but first we will address several questions about books in general, albeit in a severely condensed and simplified fashion.

Although it might seem straightforward, there is no clear answer to the seemingly simple question of ‘how many books’ there are in the world, nor is there any clear consensus on how even to define a book. A definition largely accepted at the international level for statistical purposes comes from a 1964 UNESCO Recommendation, which defines a book as a non-periodical publication containing at least 49 pages (cover page excluded), published in a particular country, and available to the public; the recommendation also defines first editions, re-editions, reprints, translations, and titles.³ Most of the available historical analyses dealing with ‘developmental’ tendencies in book production since the invention of print, at least in the ‘Western’ world, tend to concentrate on an area limited to a particular time or space, and to this end they use case studies to derive more generally valid principles and generalisations. But these accounts offer little in the way of reliable data that could be used to create a large-scale and long-term comparative overview of the actual development of book production. Even the reliability of international statistics is questionable, as alternative technologies of reproduction and unregistered institutions, which produce countless numbers of printed volumes, have expanded rapidly. We essentially have very limited knowledge of how many titles are being published at any given time in the world, let alone their print runs. Only basic estimates can be made about genres and (to some extent recorded) commercial areas by hypothetically calculating the number of titles there are in particular publication categories and then

³ Robert Escarpit, *The Book Revolution* (Paris: UNESCO, 1966). See also UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Culture & Communication, Book Production. In: http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=5096_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC, (accessed 25 May 2006).

multiply them by the number of estimated print runs. In other words, the construction of knowledge about books and related issues, such as reading and literacy, is and has always been a complicated endeavour.

It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that countries in the Euro-American region started compiling representative national bibliographies, most of which, however, did not include works produced by any techniques other than print. Even the French⁴ and German bibliographies, which are among the most thoroughly researched in the world, cannot be deemed comprehensive. Similarly, the compilation of the main source of information on book production in Bohemia and Slovakia, *Knihopis československých tisků od doby nejstarší až do konce XVIII. století* (two bibliographic volumes published in 1925 and 1967), was accompanied by significant difficulties.⁵ It was not just the limited availability of items to be registered and the lack of qualified staff, secondary professional literature, and funding, but also the turmoil of the Second World War and the communist coup of 1948 that shaped the complex history of this ambitious project.⁶

⁴ See Robert Estivals, *La Statistique bibliographique de la France sous la monarchie au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: La Haye, 1965).

⁵ *Knihopis českých a slovenských tisků od doby nejstarší až do konce XVIII. století* [A Bibliography of Czech and Slovak Prints from Earliest Times to the End of the 18th Century] Edited by Zdeněk Václav Tobolka, *Part I – Prvotisky* [Incunabula], (Prague: Knihkupectví Fr. Topiče, 1925); *Part II – Tisky z let 1501–1800, Vol. I – IX* [Prints 1501–1800]; Vol. V edited by Dr. František Horák (Prague: Státní tiskárna, Národní knihovna, 1939–1967).

⁶ The first attempts to compile a Czech national bibliography, made by the two key figures of the Czech National Revival, Josef Dobrovský and Josef Jungmann, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, suffered from the fact that these two individuals carried out much of this mammoth task on their own. Also, Jungmann – who worked with the catalogues of several Prague major libraries – admitted that he had never actually held in his own hands many of the volumes he drew excerpts from, and he had to rely on ‘second-hand’ references to them. After the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia Z. V. Tobolka was able to put together an expert committee (1923) that co-ordinated work on the *Knihopis* for 25 years and worked not just with major Czech and Slovak libraries but also, for example, with three hundred local museums. Although the committee struggled with a variety of administrative and logistic barriers, including the need to find suitable premises to work in, it succeeded in producing the first volume on incunabula by 1925. In 1948 the committee was dissolved and the project was taken over by the Communist Ministry of Culture, which had been transferred under the authority of the National Library and its second part was finally completed following the personal intervention of a Tobolka’s successor F. Horák in 1967. See Václav Pumprla, “Místo Knihopisu v dějinách české a slovenské literatury,” [The Place of the ‘Knihopis’ in the History of Czech and Slovak Literature], proceedings from a conference on “Současné trendy ve zpřístupňování fondů,” [Current Trends in the Accessibility of Library Resources], held in Olomouc, Czech Republic, on 18–19 November 2003. In <http://www.svkol.cz/konf/03ref03.htm#fn6>, (accessed 29 May 2006).

Although it is virtually impossible to get comprehensive and concise information about book production, not only on a global scale, but also for individual regions, it is possible to make a few basic observations about some developmental trends in book production. Nevertheless, perhaps more than any other man-made object books have always resisted any kind of progressive linear development. Not even the introduction of the paperback in 1935 and its subsequent spread, which made books cheaper and more accessible, affected every country, not even within Europe.⁷ The much hailed 'book revolution' in the late 1950s and early 1960s was mostly a revolution in print runs and was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in the number of titles. And as reading surveys have shown, no substantial 'reading revolution' ensued either.⁸

The rate of book production in the world has always been referred to in estimates rather than facts. Barker, for example, estimated the annual global production of books at 500 million in the 1950s.⁹ However, Escarpit argued that such a figure would mean the publication of 270 000 titles with a print run of 20 000 copies each, which is highly improbable outside the most developed countries, as in most countries the average print run is between 3000 and 6000 copies.¹⁰ A report from the UNESCO World Congress of Books held in London in 1982, to which Escarpit also contributed, indicated an uneven course of development of book production worldwide. In the 1970s, well before the boom in electronic publishing, the annual growth in the number of titles was estimated at approximately 23%. This means that while an estimated 521 000 titles were published in 1970, by 1978 the number had risen to 642 000. But in 1970 the mere 29% of the world's population living in the developed world was responsible for the production of 87% of all copies and 93% of all titles.¹¹ The UNESCO report also noted the concentration of book production mainly within the Euro-American region, which is reflected in the distribution of languages in total book production. In 1978 alone, over one-quarter of all books

⁷ This issue will be taken up at a later point, but it is worth noting that Czech book-buyers still favoured hardcover books for at least a decade after book production began to be privatised in 1989.

⁸ R. Escarpit (1966).

⁹ Ronald Ernest Barker, *Books for All* (Paris: UNESCO, 1956).

¹⁰ Robert Escarpit, *Trends in Book Worldwide Development 1970–1978* (Paris: UNESCO, 1982).

¹¹ *Part I, International Book Year Plus Ten. An Analysis of Present Trends and Forecast for the Future* (Paris: UNESCO, 1982), 8.

published were in English, 14.8% in Russian, 11.5% in German, and 7% in Spanish. However, in some regions there are no relevant statistics on book production, or, at least, they are not internationally available. This raises the question of whether Africa's 1% share in the world's book production in the 1970s is a reference to the number of books or a reflection of the inadequate statistical records in that region.¹² To sum up, while some parts of the world have already begun talking about entering the 'post-book' era, most have not even entered the Gutenberg galaxy, and it is question whether they ever will.

One trend that book experts noted decades ago is the decreasing production of literary texts as opposed to what Escarpit calls "functional" books. Escarpit noted that in 1952, in almost half the countries included in UNESCO statistics, 25% of the total book production was devoted to literature, but by 1962 that figure had decreased to 20%, and it has continued to fall since.¹³ Some have regarded this as yet more evidence of the 'end of civilisation and its culture'; such references were particularly strong when this trend hit the post-communist countries after the privatisation of the publishing industry in the early 1990s. But it would be hard to complain of limited access to *belles lettres* in these countries, as the relative decrease in the share of literary titles was accompanied by an absolute increase in the number of titles overall. Relatively accurate data on the titles and copies produced are not, however, a very accurate reflection of book markets and book consumption, even in countries that never experienced central control over the book industry. In addition, it is necessary to take into consideration what Escarpit called the process of 'historical selection', whereby 80% of books are forgotten within a year of their publication, and 99% vanish from public memory within twenty years of publication of the first edition.¹⁴ However exaggerated Escarpit's somewhat Darwinian conclusion may seem, it prompts a number of questions about the social mechanisms behind the selection process and the inclusion or exclusion of certain titles. It also raises questions about the extent to which

¹² For example, current UNESCO statistics on world book production (edited 2002), which are available on line, do not include any data at all on many African countries, including South Africa, where the only figure quoted is from the year 1999. See UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Culture and Communication, Book Production: Number of Titles by the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), 1995–1999. In: http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=6234_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC, (accessed 30 May 2006).

¹³ R. Escarpit (1966), 69.

¹⁴ R. Escarpit (1966), 34.

the list of ‘surviving’ titles corresponds with what is contemporaneously considered a culture’s literary canon, and about the processes whereby a society legitimises its cultural heritage. The selective survival of books does prevent the book world and its readers from being overwhelmed by complete chaos, but unlike Darwinian selection, ‘book selection’ has historically never been a ‘natural’ process. In this regard, the centrally controlled system of book production provides an almost ideal example of how such artificially constructed selective mechanisms operate and their social implications.

The seemingly simple questions of who is reading and what is being read likewise appear nearly impossible to answer. These questions have engaged not only educators and, indeed, censors, but also empirical researchers and scholars specialising in literary studies. According to Roger Chartier, the history of reading has generally been divided into two kinds of approaches: the first aims at surpassing or improving on traditional literary history; the second sets out from a social history on the uses of writing. Chartier suggested that “the aesthetic of reception of German scholars, the reader-response theory of American literary criticism, and studies based on Russian and Czech formalism (all of which are critical stances more historically oriented than French or American structuralism) were attempts to separate reading from the work and to understand reading as an interpretation of a text not completely determined by linguistic discursive techniques and devices.”¹⁵ And it was Roland Barthes’s legendary burial of the author that generated a trend in scholarship that could be labelled a reader-response obsession.¹⁶ The reader as a category originally emerged in an attempt to name, examine, and highlight the reception aspect in the process of textual communication. This category gradually became methodologically isolated and viewed as a category that to a large extent operates independently of the text’s semantic potential, not to mention independently of the author’s original intentions. The category of the reader is then closely linked to the issue of literacy, which has attracted the attention of practitioners as well as theorists mainly owing to the key role it was assigned in the process of the ‘acculturation’ of modern (Western) society. In this context Harvey J. Graff referred to “the

¹⁵ Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, “Introduction,” in Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (Oxford: Polity, 2003), 33.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Flamingo, 1984, 1977).

'tyranny of *conceptual dichotomies*' in the study and interpretation of literacy", which is reflected in the commonly used phrases "literate *and* illiterate, written *and* oral, print *and* script".¹⁷

There are countless historical references to the role of reading and literacy in the development of modern (Western) societies, the public sphere, independent thinking, and so on, and in the consequent enforcement of this development with the invention of print.¹⁸ It could perhaps be said that it was the binary 'tyranny' identified by Graff that made it possible for literacy to become a powerful discursive weapon in the 'revolutionary' turnovers of the 20th century. The notion of the close links between books, reading, and power has traditionally been influential, despite the fact that there is actually very little consensus over the actual social and cultural impact of literacy and reading. Some views tend to emphasise the elitist nature of reading and owning books, and others focus on the role of reading in the growth of an informed public sphere. In other words, two main tendencies can be traced in the now massive amount of literature on the issues of reading and literacy: reading can essentially be viewed as either a tool of social *differentiation* or a tool of social *homogenisation*.

There also seems to be very little consensus over the very definitions of reading and literacy, let alone a clear borderline between them. For example, in his seminal work on the relationship between orality and literacy, Walter Ong demonstrated persuasively that while the spread of literacy and print deeply influenced public culture and communication, oral tradition continued to be a part of this communication, at least throughout the early modern era.¹⁹ Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux's study of the reading of 'heretical' books in rural areas in 18th-century Bohemia provides an illustrative example of the complex relationship between predominantly oral cultures and print-oriented cultures, and although her primary concern is the multilayered link between the Reformation and literacy, her work can also be read as a

¹⁷ Harvey J. Graff, *The Labyrinth of Literacy. Reflections on Literacy Past and Present* (London: The Falmer Press, 1987), 24.

¹⁸ Some classic studies on the links between the press and the development of (Western) European modern civilisation include works by Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800* (London: N.L.B., 1976, reprint by London: Verso, 1997).

¹⁹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1988, 1993).

challenge to the tyranny of conceptual dichotomies in the study and interpretation of literacy identified by Harvey J. Graff.²⁰ She provides substantial evidence that the two traditions overlapped in Central Europe, and she shows that not only could various levels of literacy (e.g. reading printed texts only, reading but not writing) be found among the population, but also that they were combined with a variety of oral exchanges. Reading was frequently performed as “sung reading”, as “in themselves, the hymns constituted a mode of acquisition of knowledge”.²¹ ‘Readers’, moreover, exhibited varying ability to memorise, reproduce, and indeed even understand the texts read.

The difficulties involved in reconstructing the obviously non-linear story of books and reading derive from the fact that there is not much in the way of exact and reliable data on the development of reading and literacy either locally or worldwide. Also, like theories and cultures, data tend to be nomadic in the sense that they often ‘travel’ from one resource to another and are appropriated accordingly.²² In addition, the course of development of literacy is often determined on the basis of secondary textual sources, such as wedding contracts, birth and marriage registers, and wills.²³ There have certainly been many attempts

²⁰ In her study she quotes Anna Němečková, a North Bohemian peasant woman accused in 1753 of keeping and reading heretic books. For her, illiteracy was clearly a sign of Catholic orthodoxy, while literacy was associated with alternative religions. During her interrogation she said: “And I really thought that he [her father] was Catholic, because he didn’t know how to read very well, not enough to go seeking something heretical. But my mother, she looked at heretic books”. Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, “Reading unto Death: Books and Readers in Eighteenth-Century Bohemia,” in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 191–229, 201.

²¹ M-E. Ducreux (1989), 217.

²² Graff provides just one example of this ‘data tourism’. In order to demonstrate the general spread of literacy across Europe, he refers to the ‘pioneering work’ of Sylvia Thrupp, who presented “evidence of a 40 percent literacy rate amongst ‘employed’ males”. Richard D. Altick used the same source, but in a somewhat less generalising fashion, quoting Thrupp’s sample of “116 witnesses before the consistory court in 1467–76” of whom “some 40 percent were recorded as literate” in order to suggest that only “a few unsatisfactory scraps of evidence survive[d]” that provide us with some information on the literate public in the time of William Caxton. See J.H. Graff, (1987) p. 139 in reference to Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1962) and Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: a Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800–1900* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967), 15, in reference to Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Chicago, 1948), 156.

²³ Even methods used in the historical study of literacy have recently undergone considerable change. Ducreux showed that the ability to sign one’s name can no longer be regarded as direct proof of literacy. In her sample of 192 individuals, only 42% were able to sign their names while 90% of them were accused of having owned, lent, and sold books during 1713 and 1771. M-E. Ducreux (1989), 213.

to contemplate book production, reading and literacy in relation to the general social, political, and economic progress of modern societies. Graff has pointed out that even UNESCO publications tend to view literacy as a precondition of industrialisation and economic growth.²⁴ But even the most enthusiastic defences of the rise of the 'learning' and 'reading' society, which were notions and visions quite popular during the 1960s–1980s, reveal some progressive pessimism. UNESCO's statistical estimates indicated that by the late 1970s there would be 814 million illiterate people in the world, which would then increase to 884 million by the 1990s, as the relative decrease in the illiteracy rate (down from 32.4% in 1970 to 28.9% in 1980) has lagged behind the absolute growth in the size of the world's population.²⁵ Moreover, only a very small proportion of the literate population becomes what in literacy studies is known as a 'regular reader'. The notion of the 'reader' also tends to reduce textual perception to the perception of *belles lettres*, a tendency that can be identified in both descriptive and prescriptive studies on reading since the 18th century. A similar kind of reduction also seems to be present in the more recent concept of 'functional' or 'secondary illiteracy' observed even in the most developed countries in the world.²⁶ It perhaps need not be emphasised that even in countries defined as 'developed' the practice of reading is not democratically distributed among the population.²⁷

The exploration of the non-linear and often conflicting relationship between reading on the one hand and 'Western civilisation', 'modernisation', and industrialisation on the other has a history of its own.

²⁴ J.H. Graff (1987), 65

²⁵ *Estimates and Projections on Illiteracy* (Paris: UNESCO, 1978). Quoted in *Part I International Book Year* (1982), 16.

²⁶ One of the most economically and industrially advanced countries, the United States, was already declaring between 23 and 26 million functionally 'illiterate' inhabitants in the 1980s, a number that has grown since with increasing immigration. Some US sources that consider anyone who has not completed eight years of compulsory education as 'functionally illiterate' refer to a figure of up to 60 million partly or secondary illiterate people in the United States. Just 45% of the population in the UK in 1980 and 54% of Australians claimed in 1990 that they had recently started reading a book. See Peter H. Mann, *From Author to Reader: A Social Study of Books* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Hans Hoegh Guldberg, *Books – Who Reads Them? A Study of Borrowing and Buying in Australia* (Sydney: Australian Council 1990).

²⁷ A pioneering survey conducted in 1968–1969 among British library users and bookstore shoppers showed that the majority of the people buying and borrowing books were male, young, upper-middle class professionals, while people employed in manual jobs still represented a minority among those using book-related services. See P. H. Mann (1982).

In Friedrich Engels's classic but often overlooked work, *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, he noted that the development of industry, followed by the expansion of cheap child labour in factories, actually led to a decline in literacy within the respective social group.²⁸ Engels's point has essentially been confirmed by more recent studies, which have challenged the notion of any direct inter-dependency between literacy and economic growth. Graff also cites the example of early 19th-century England, arguing that "the Industrial Revolution cannot be seen as one 'nourished' by rising education standards at the primary level" for "the very nature of industrialization made very low literacy demands".²⁹ Engels's analysis was quite detailed, and he noted that although work performed by children under the age of nine was legally regulated by the Factory Act of 1834, which "limited the work of children between 9 to 13 years to forty-eight per week, or nine hours in any one day at utmost; that of young persons from 14 to 18 years of age to sixty-nine per week" and made daily school attendance for two hours compulsory for all children under the age of fourteen employed in factories, this regulation produced only poor results.³⁰ The teachers employed by the manufacturers were "worn-out workers and other unsuitable persons who only turn to teaching in order to live", while the children, tired after twelve-hour shifts, would understandably fall asleep during their lessons, which took place between 8 and 10 pm.³¹

Although Engels's approach to studying literacy and reading was soon criticised for the shortcomings in his work, including his idyllic view of pre-industrial England and an unfair, simplified treatment of the bourgeoisie, the notion of the devastating impact of industrialisation (and consequently also commercialisation) on the working classes, and particularly on what we would today call their patterns of cultural participation took on a life of its own in the work of many other scholars. It also resonated strongly in the early works of scholars affiliated

²⁸ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. with an introduction by David McLellan (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Among other things, he quotes from the speech Lord Ashley made to introduce the Ten Hours Bill on 15 March 1844: "[of] 419,560 factory operatives of the British Empire" in 1839 "nearly half were under 18 years of age". (p. 152) He also refers to the Central Commission report of 1833 stating that "the manufacturers began to employ children rarely of 5 years. Often of 6, very often of 7, usually of 8 to 9 years; that the working day often lasted fourteen to sixteen hours exclusive of intervals." (p. 160).

²⁹ J.H. Graff (1987), 65.

³⁰ F. Engels (1993), 180–181.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

with British Cultural Studies, for whom the notions of reading and literacy represented key categories of critical cultural analyses.³² Richard Hoggart, for example, in his sharp and today legendary critique of mass-produced printed matter, a piece he had written by the late 1950s, expressed his concern about the way in which newer forces were adapting and modifying elements in what was once a fairly distinctive working-class culture. He admits that “no one could fail to be glad that most working classes are in almost all respects better off”, but the “accompanying cultural changes are not always an improvement but in some of the important instances are a worsening”.³³ While the volume of book production in the UK in the 1950s was among the largest in the world, and according to a 1950 Gallup Poll 55% of respondents claimed they were currently reading a book, the quality (aesthetic, ethic, etc.) of that production was, at least according to Hoggart, questionable. In his view, “we are becoming culturally class-less”, as differences between papers and magazines that previously targeted middle- and working-class readers as separate groups are now becoming less and less significant.³⁴ Hoggart concluded his account with a rather bleak vision of the future, by making a – for this area of British Cultural Studies typically simplifying – reference to the ‘communist’ world, suggesting that “meanwhile, the freedom from official interference enjoyed in this kind of society (democratic), coupled with the tolerance we ourselves are so happy to show, seems to be allowing cultural developments as dangerous in their own way as those we are shocked at in totalitarian societies”.³⁵

Some pioneering works on the history of the British reading public compiled outside the UK, such as the seminal study by Richard Altick, highlight the development of the press, which “forced the governing class to concede more and more power to the artisan and labourer” and as such had an “important effect ... upon the social habits of the

³² The key works in which notions of reading and literacy were addressed include: Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Penguin, 1992 (first edition 1957)); Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Hogarth Press, 1992 (first edition 1961)) and *Culture & Society* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958). Another – today classic – text of the school concerned with the working class and its culture was E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (V. Gollancz, 1963).

³³ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Penguin, 1992 (first edition 1957)), 318.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 345.

Victorian era”.³⁶ Altick even devoted special attention to the role of women not only in the formation and expansion of a reading public, but also in the development of English literature as such. The main reason for this was that “there was comparatively little for the literate but uneducated women to read.” Thus “the time was ripe for a Richardson”, and when Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* was released in 1740–1741, “its success and that of the novels that followed it revealed the extent of the female audience which for several decades had been waiting for something to read”.³⁷ To illustrate these ‘progressive’ trends in the development of the reading public, Altick noted that while the population of England in 1750 was between six and seven million, and the reading public was estimated at approximately 80 000 people in 1790, five editions (the size of the print run is unknown) of *Pamela* were sold in one year (1740). Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742) was published in three editions producing a total of 6500 copies over thirteen months. His *Amelia* (1751) “sold out its first edition of 5000 copies in a week or less”.³⁸

However, Altick has also drawn attention to the darker sides of a relative publishing boom, pointing out that “ironically, as a climax to a century that prided itself on its unprecedented diffusion of learning, newly published books were priced completely out of the ordinary man’s reach”.³⁹ Raymond Williams, in one of his later works, noted that, although new printing methods and the use of cloth instead of leather binding meant that by the 1830s and 1840s books had become much cheaper, the practice of book reading was still largely dependent on the reader’s social and economic background and continued to be so despite the general increase in literacy.⁴⁰ Altick offers a noteworthy view on what could be called alternative book production by pointing out that “the prosperity of the (book) pirates” in the 1770s is a good indication that “the demand for books was greater than the supply provided by the regular booksellers”.⁴¹

Both Altick and Williams connect the growth of book production to the growth of the population in general and to the growing size of the

³⁶ Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800–1900* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967), 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁹ R.D. Altick (1967), 52.

⁴⁰ Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1983), 70.

⁴¹ R.D. Altick (1967), 52.

reading public, which stemmed from rising income levels, the expansion of the middle and lower-middle classes, and overall changes in society and the economy. But Williams argues that the high literacy rates and large numbers of titles published do not necessarily signify widespread, regular readership. More sceptically he remarks that up to the end of the 18th century the literate segment of the English population probably grew quite slowly.⁴² Not even government intervention, such as the 1870 Education Act, generated any massive increase in literacy, with the highest rates remaining mainly among the urban male population. Williams cites statistics indicating that 94.65% of the mainland population in 1893 were able to sign their marriage contract, as opposed to 58.4% in 1839, but no simple and direct link can be drawn between the spread of literacy and the actual development of a 'mass' reading public.⁴³

Altick highlights the many essentially encouraging trends in reading and publishing that occurred in the late 18th century and supports them with data on literacy and print runs, but he also almost uncritically accepts Engels's interpretation of working-class culture during this era. He suggests that the "great immigration from village to city produced a crisis in popular culture", but "when the villager was transformed into the slum-dwelling factory labourer, however, this tradition was lost to him".⁴⁴ He even adopts Engels's romanticised vision of English villagers, including their "custom of reading by the fireside", which vanished "along with other homely habits", while their books were "no longer prized as symbols of a family's continuity".⁴⁵ Once these traditional ties were broken, the worst thing that happened was the worker's "loss of personal individuality" and the ensuing "overwhelming loneliness the individual man and woman felt in the midst of the crowd".⁴⁶ It is difficult to overlook the amount of sentimentality there is in Altick's conclusion that it was at this point, more than ever before, that reading would have provided a necessary escape for those "physically and spiritually imprisoned" people.⁴⁷

While the work of Altick and that of his British counterparts holds a great deal of inspiring methodological potential, especially the way in

⁴² R. Williams (1992), 166.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁴ R.D. Altick (1967), 95.

⁴⁵ R.D. Altick (1967), 95.

⁴⁶ R.D. Altick (1967), 95.

⁴⁷ R.D. Altick (1967), 97.

which they combine data on print runs and literacy in order to support their main points about the development of printed culture, they also demonstrate some of the internal conflicts and contradictions that tend to accompany the study of books. Here there is a conflict between the incredibly high social expectations imposed on reading, which was supposed to be the conveyor of social progress, and its role as a tool with which to subvert the dominant political power or even as a space in which individuals could find escape from spiritual imprisonment. Williams also takes up the issue of escapist reading and suggests that there are more complex “distinctions between ways of living which stimulate attention and allow rest” and those which produce just “an unfocused restlessness that has somehow to be appeased” with the “easy drug” of reading. And Williams does not miss an opportunity to underline that this is an aspect of society that goes beyond the field of books and publication to create and strengthen conditions “based on some more adequate principle than that of quick profit, with the speculators setting the pace”.⁴⁸ At the same time, contrary to what one might expect, many other accounts, including Hoggart’s, approach reading as a mechanism that can contribute to social differentiation and consequently generate inequalities, but that can also support social homogenisation and thus destroy the traditional distinctions in class cultures.

The rehabilitation of the ‘common reader’ and his or her working-class culture as both an object of critical enquiry and a possible target of socio-cultural change; concerns about social inequalities in access to the printed word; the (potentially deterministic) interest in so-called extra-textual aspects of textual communication; the attempt to establish a (not necessarily positive) link between books, reading, and social progress: all these issues resonate in the early work of representatives of British Cultural Studies. Indeed, as scholars affiliated with the legendary Birmingham centre remind us, including Ann Gray, and Williams himself for that matter, the early history of cultural studies cannot be reduced to a set of ‘classic’ texts. Its roots lie primarily in adult education courses, the history of which goes back to the 1940s.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ R. Williams (1992), 172.

⁴⁹ Ann Gray, “Formation of Cultural Studies,” in *CCCS Selected Working Papers: Volume 1*, ed. Ann Gray, Jan Campbell, Mark Erickson, Stuart Hanson and Helen Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 1–13; Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. and intro. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989), 151–162.

Nonetheless, the early key works of the ‘godfathers’ – and this cannot be overlooked – were also produced and situated in the context of the first decade of the Cold War. Their preoccupation with the underclass, non-elites and underprivileged was in a number of cases (Williams, Hoggart) autobiographically motivated and largely inspired by Marxism (Williams) and by the British New Left that emerged in the aftershock of the British and, French invasion of Suez and Russia’s bloody suppression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, an event that brought an end to, as Stuart Hall puts it, “a certain kind of socialist ‘innocence’”.⁵⁰ This thematic subtext in the studies could also perhaps be read as a kind of counter-reaction to, and thus in a way a reproduction of, the dominant Cold-War discourse at that time, a discourse driven by a paranoid sense of threat from ‘communism’, i.e. the experimental attempt to install an egalitarian and classless society and culture. Although this is hardly ever discussed in histories of cultural studies, some of the issues and notions about the relationship between the text or culture and society noted in early seminal works on the subject could also – though in geopolitically very different forms, and isolated from the development of British critical cultural theory – be found in the theories that informed and justified practices of the command system of book production.⁵¹

There is no point diving any deeper into the issue of the relationship between Marxism and literature, culture, and books, as this had been done quite thoroughly in countless more focused and competent accounts. However commonplace it may seem, the key idea behind the practices of books and readers in the command system was about moving rather than contemplating the wheel of history. It is also a commonly shared view that many of the classical Marxist concepts were elaborated in response to the real political demands of the ‘class struggle’. As Roland Barthes noted, “from the very start Marxist writing is presented as the language of knowledge. ... Being linked to action, Marxist writing has rapidly become, in fact, a language

⁵⁰ Stuart Hall, “The ‘first’ New Left: Life and Times,” *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years on*, ed. Oxford University Socialist Group (London: Verso Books, 1989), 13. Cited in A. Gray (2007), 3.

⁵¹ The histories of cultural studies produced in the course of last two decades include John Storey, *What Is Cultural Studies? A Reader* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1996); Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1991); John Hartley, *A Short History of Cultural Studies* (London, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2003); Mark Gibson, *Culture and Power: A History of Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

expressing value judgments ... In the Stalinist world, in which *definition*, that is to say, the separation between Good and Evil, becomes the sole content of all language, there are no more words without values attached to them ... there is no more laps of time between naming and judging...”⁵² Nevertheless, Marxism had a long journey ahead it before it turned into a lifelong exercise in “memorising ridiculous nonsense about the rules of the socialist economy” in order to “make a humiliating gesture of loyalty to the criminal regime”, as the Czech sociologist Ivo Možný described it in his analyses of the socio-cultural milieu of former Czechoslovakia just before 1989, a time and place pregnant with change.

When it comes to the issues of writing, reading, and culture in more general terms, it must be stressed that, although many thinkers, including Lukács, considered Marx’s and Engels’s ideas about the (literary) text to be an integral part of the materialistic conception of history, others, and Wellek was certainly one of them, noted that there is no concise system that can be derived from the way the classics of Marxism dealt with art and culture, which were regarded more as an appendix to the economic and political theories. Despite the many edited collections of the texts by “the classics on arts and literature” produced in most former socialist countries, it was hard to hide the fact that, at least in Marx’s own work, the amount of attention devoted to art and literature, compared to other fields, was very limited in terms of pages and the sharpness of analytical insight. Although Marx’s own statement about having learned more about the principles of capitalist production from reading Balzac than from the texts of classical political economy is by now a cliché, it is a succinct indication of his general attitude to the entire sphere of art and culture: literature (the text) is not out there for itself; it always *serves* some extra-literary purpose, by acting as a depository of positive knowledge about or at least as an illustration of a certain social phenomenon.

There seem to be numerous controversies embedded in the relationship between Marxism and the issues of reading and books, not to mention between Marxism and the issues of the ‘common reader’ and his or her revolutionary agenda. On top of that, as Jonathan Rose reminds us, “in fact, most workers did have great difficulty reading

⁵² Roland Barthes, “On Revolution and Writing,” *Writing Degree Zero* (New York : Hill and Wang, 1968), 40–41.

Marx and Marxists" who "generally and glaringly failed to produce literature accessible to the working classes".⁵³ But as the legendary reference to Balzac also demonstrates, Marx's and Engels's usually radical, assured, and even arrogant rhetoric softens on those rare occasions when they articulate their views on the 'non-productive' spheres of life. And in this they radically differed from their revolutionary followers decades later. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of these 'softer' statements are found not in the texts they wrote for public presentation but in their private correspondence. For example, in a letter to Minna Kautsky, an Austrian actress, novelist, and dramatist, on 26 November 1885, Engels wrote, almost defensively: "I am by no means opposed to tendentious poetry as such. ... I think however that the solution of the problem must become manifest from the situation and the action themselves without being expressly pointed out and that the author is not obliged to serve the reader on a platter the future historical solution of the social conflicts which he describes."⁵⁴

Wellek also identified a tendency to back away from what are considered radical Marxist standpoints, emphasising the deterministic relationship between the productive and non-productive spheres of human life, in Marx's comments on the superstructure. For example, in the 'Introduction' to the *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx slightly tones down the sharpness of his statement about the social determination of human consciousness, admitting that "certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct relation to the general development of society, nor the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization".⁵⁵ Wellek noted that some of the classic Marxist writings seem to stray from the Marxist position altogether, and he found that in his personal letters Engels admitted that Marx overestimated the economic aspects and that they had both 'neglected' the formal processes by which ideas develop.⁵⁶

⁵³ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn. London: Yale Nota Bene, 2002), 305.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Minna Kautsky," London 26 November 1885' in *Marxists on Literature: an Anthology*, ed. David Craig (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 267–269.

⁵⁵ R. Wellek (1973), 107.

⁵⁶ R. Wellek (1973), Footnote 27, 287–288. Wellek refers, for example, to Engels's letter to Starkenburg on 25 January 1894 and to Joseph Bloch on 21 September 1890. In *Selected Works [of] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), 391, 383, 390.

The ‘softer’ discourses that characterise both Engels’s and Marx’s writings on arts and culture contrast sharply with the aggressive revolutionary rhetoric of a tendency-driven culture, which eventually dominated the statements of the hard-core communist Marxist-led cultural authorities and were backed up with regulatory interventions, especially during the first decade of the Cold War. With Engels’s letter to Kautsky in mind, it is worth reading, for example, the following lines by Ladislav Štoll and Jiří Taufer, the key Czech ideologues behind the doctrine of ‘socialist realism’ that dominated Czech cultural theory and practice of the respective era. Eighty years after Engels, these two came to the conclusion that “the grandiose constructive pathos of our times can evidently leave no true artist ignorant as this pathos is forcing him to express it by all artistic means. ... Grandiose artist is able to install ideology into any theme, may this be portraits of statesmen or of our heroes of work, epic themes from the history of revolutionary struggle ... or portraits of our children. ... It is the spirit of revolt against crippling of [our beautiful socialist] life that should infuse our new arts”.⁵⁷

Quoting the statements of communist leaders and their peers active in the sphere of cultural management during the in the 1950s is always an effective, though for many still chilling, way of demonstrating how bizarre and nearly unbelievable the official discourse that used to dominate that particular socio-cultural context actually was, and there shall be more such offerings in the coming chapters. It must be stressed, though, that these statements and slogans are not just part of the ‘waxworks museum’ of the discourse of communism; in the past they were actually a real part of the state’s social and cultural policy. At this point suffice it to say that there has never been any simple link between leftist or Marxist views on society and culture and real-life experimentation with regulated cultural production. Marx certainly reminded his readers that “a writer is a productive labourer not in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches the publisher who publishes his works, or if he is a wage-labourer for a

⁵⁷ Ladislav Štoll and Jiří Taufer, “Proti sektářství a liberalismu – za rozkvět našeho umění,” (1952) [Against Sectarianism and Liberalism – Towards the Blossoming of Our Arts, 1952], in *Z dějin českého myšlení o literatuře 2 (1948–1958) Antologie k Dějinám české literatury 1945–1990* [From the History of Czech Thought on Literature, Vol. 2 (1948–1958), Anthology to the History of Czech literature], ed. Michal Příbáň (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, Edice Dokumenty, 2002), 95.

capitalist”.⁵⁸ But neither Marx nor Engels actually provided a clear and direct analysis of the conflict between the ‘unproductive’ forces of culture and the ‘unproductive’ relations within culture, an analysis comparable to that of the ‘productive’ spheres of capitalist society, which could have set the stage for a cultural revolution or at least specified how the command-system of cultural production and reception should be set up.

Lenin, who, as Lunacharsky noted, “put cognitive activities directly into the service of revolutionary practice”, certainly developed his own notion of ‘party literature’. He also promoted the idea that there is no such a thing as an ideology-free, purely cultural (textual) product, and as such all cultural (textual) production must necessarily serve the contradictory class interests of either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie.⁵⁹ But even in his radical call for ‘party literature’ in 1905, Lenin was still willing to assure his audiences that he and his political peers were not going to “advocate any kind of standardised system, or a solution by means of a few decrees ... Emerging from the captivity of the feudal censorship, we have no desire to become, and shall not become, prisoners of bourgeois-shopkeeper literary relations. We want to establish, and we shall establish, a free press, free not simply from the police, but also from capital, from careerism, and what is more, free from bourgeois-anarchist individualism”. Nonetheless, later enforcers (Lunacharsky, Zhdanov) of the ‘standardised system’ abandoned by Lenin were able to continue to justify their actions with references to

⁵⁸ Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Chapter 4, in *Marx Engels On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976); available on-line from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch04.htm#s1> (accessed 1 May 2009).

⁵⁹ Quoted from a Czech translation of Anatolij Vasiljevič Lunačarskij, *Stati o umění. Estetika, kulturní politika, teorie literatury* [Essays on the Arts. Aesthetics, Cultural Politics and Theory of Literature] (Prague: Odeon, 1975), 442. To get a more precise sense of Lenin’s writing style, it is worth quoting his definition of ‘party literature’: “What is this principle of party literature? It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become *part* of the common cause of the proletariat, ‘a cog and a screw’ of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organised, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.” All quotes from Vladimir I. Lenin, “Party Organisation and Party Literature,” *Novaya Zhizn* 12 (13 November 1905); available at Marxist Internet Archive (2001) <http://www.marx.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/nov/13.htm> (accessed 1 May 2009).

'Marxism', not so much because its theory of arts and culture was not clearly articulated, but because the practical potential or 'link to action' that Marxism contained granted legitimacy to the totalitarian notion of a text as a tool with which to generate social conflict and thereby exercise control. Stalin's well-known reference to fiction writers as 'the engineers of human souls' was just the tip of the iceberg. At the same time, the relative inconsistency of Marxist approaches to the 'un-productive' areas, such as culture, arts, and writing, may also have been one of the reasons why it was possible for them to become such a bountiful source of vulgarised slogans and manipulative practices, some of which will be addressed in the following chapters. Paradoxically, in their attempt to overcome this inconsistency, the cultural practitioners and ideologists who followed Marxist guidelines during the Cold-War period established considerable space for nearly unlimited institution-alised social control, which was intended to guarantee the central authority's dominance over all fields of production, and, indeed, over the reception of knowledge, meanings, and ideas. This system enabled a degree of central control over cultural production and reception that, in terms of its intensity and scope, both historical and geographical, is essentially without parallel in modern Euro-American history.

CHAPTER TWO

MONITORING THE 'RED MODEL'

Although the management and production of culture in the Soviet satellite region did not simply replicate the model established in Moscow, it is probably a commonly shared view that the Soviet Union was in the front line of experimentation with centrally controlled culture and was also a key producer of knowledge on cultural practices. In the Soviet Union, more than anywhere else in the Eastern bloc, the close link between books and power was not just explored but also reinforced for over seventy years. At this point just a few remarks will be made about the development of ideas about command books and about the way their production and reception was monitored in research conducted in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe.¹

The Soviet regime and the communist-dominated governments that emerged after the Second World War in Europe based their theory and practices of publishing and reading on a fixed and unquestionable definition of a book. Without underestimating the role of the film industry, and poster production, and other innovative tools of propaganda, such as agitating boats, the Russian Bolsheviks regarded the printed

¹ Inevitably, the following account can provide only very limited insight into discussions of the centralised system of textual production and related cultural and social issues. One possible criterion for selecting examples of such studies and accounts of the centrally controlled book and its use could be accessibility. Rather than presenting the 'objective' body of knowledge that exists in the region, one can, to some extent reconstruct a pool of texts that would have been available to a local scholar in the last decades of the Cold War in the major research libraries in one location – Prague. These texts would have shaped local researchers' ideas about books and would consequently have co-constructed their knowledge on the subject. For this study, the following collections were consulted: Národní knihovna [National Library], Knihovna Akademie věd České republiky [Library of the Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic]; Knihovna sociologického ústavu AV ČR [Library of the Institute of Sociology] and Knihovna Filozofického ústavu AVČR [Library of the Institute of Philosophy]. A significant part of the previous Library of the Institute for Sociology and Philosophy of the former Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences is unfortunately no longer available, as it was destroyed during the floods in 2002. I am particularly grateful to Ilona Hergyközi of the Hungarian Library Institute for kindly providing me with copies of the Centre's for Library Science and Methodology publications, which were not available in either the National Library in Prague or the British Library in London, where supplementary research was conducted.

text in the manner Derrida described as ‘the civilisation of the book’, a civilisation they aspired to and wanted to be associated with in the eyes of a population with a relatively high level of illiteracy.² The ‘civilising’ powers of books were never questioned and – again in anti-deconstructivist terms – book were viewed not just as physical objects, volumes containing sheets of paper, but also and above all as a prototype of some kind of certainty, completeness, and wholeness, capable of presenting the reader with a certain section of reality in a linear (page-to-page), comprehensible fashion. The book, in its capacity to, as Derrida has it, “refer to a natural totality”, to embody “the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism” and, we should add, of a particular ideology, was intended to advance the major social transformation envisioned by the Soviet regime.³

A substantial amount of work has been done on the complex and often socially painful history of books in the Soviet geopolitical area.⁴ As Peter Kenez has noted, there is nothing innovative to arguing that the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union employed propaganda methods and made use of all available media for this purpose.⁵ However, with

² The key role of books in the context of Soviet mass propaganda, particularly in comparison with the technologically and financially demanding nature of the film industry, whose impact was limited in rural areas with little or no electricity, or effective but still simplified messages delivered in a form of posters, is explored in P. Kenez (1985).

³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1976), 18.

⁴ On Soviet literary production and reception, see Evgeny Dobrenko, transl. Jesse M. Savage, *The Making of the State Writer. Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Evgeny Dobrenko, transl. Jesse M. Savage, *The Making of the State Reader. Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997). The larger context of both literary and non-literary Soviet book production is analysed in Gregory Walker, *Soviet Book Publishing Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, 2008; first edition Cambridge UP, 1978). The book as a key vehicle of Bolshevik propaganda is examined in Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–192* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For a highly valuable source of studies in publishing and print history in the region, see the annual journal *SOLANUS: International Journal for Russian and East European Bibliographic, Library and Publishing Studies* (London: UCL SSEES, 1987–2006).

⁵ P. Kenez, (1985), 4. Unless otherwise stated, the brief summary of the development of early Soviet publishing is based on Kenez’s account (1985: 95–104, 239–250), in reference to Nikolai Fedorovich Ianitski, *Knizhnaia statistika Sovetskoi Rossii 1918–1923* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1924); Efim Abramovich Dinershtein, *Izdatel’skoe delo v pervye gody Sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow: Kniga, 1924); Aleksei Ivanovich Nazarov, *Kniga v Sovetskoi obshchestve* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964); Aleksei Ivanovich Nazarov, *Oktiabr’ i kniga* (Moscow: Akad. nauk, 1968).

regard to Soviet efforts to regulate and centralise the book industry, the regime inherited a dubious legacy from Imperial Russia. On the one hand, it left behind a highly developed literary culture and publishing industry.⁶ But on the other hand, despite the impressive improvements made under the Tsarist regime, particularly in the two decades before the revolution, advances in publishing were made while large parts of the population, especially in rural areas, remained illiterate.⁷ In addition to this legacy, the Soviet state was trying to install a radically new political and institutional system at a time when the First World War had just ended and the Civil War was still raging, and this context required flexible reactions to the immediate pressures of the ongoing struggles. Inevitably, there were strong links between this context and many features of the post-revolutionary institutional transformation of the production and reception of printed matter. The uneasy co-existence of private and state publishing in the years after the Russian Revolution; the shortage of paper owing to the decline in national paper production and the increasing dependence on imports; the high unemployment rate among printers; the collapse of distribution owing to the mismanaged activities of the central distribution network *Tsentropechat* (est. 1919), further exacerbated by dysfunctional postal services and railroads: all these factors contributed to a steep decline in the number of titles produced.⁸

⁶ Though the figures quoted by various resources vary somewhat and the way a book is defined is questionable, the available data can provide insight into at least basic trends. According to Kenez, between 1907 and 1913 the number of titles published grew from 9600 to 34 000. Peter Waldron, in order to demonstrate the achievements of Imperial Russia in the last decades of its existence, refers to the production of 1239 titles in 1855, which rose to 11 548 titles (in 42 million copies) in 1895, and to 32 000 in 1915. See P. Kenez, (1985), 96, 243; Peter Waldron, *The End of Imperial Russia, 1855–1917* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 98.

⁷ According to the empire-wide census in 1897, which included the first full survey of literacy, just 21% of the population was literate (17% in rural and 45% in urban areas). Between 1874 and 1904 the literacy of army recruits grew from 21 to 55%, while in 1913 the literacy rate was 30%, or 38% if children below school age are excluded. See P. Waldron (1997), 97. In the cities, however, the situation was very different. For example, in St. Petersburg in 1910 the literacy rate was 76.6% and in Moscow in 1912 it was 70%. In 1920 31.9% of the population in the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic and Ukraine claimed they were able to read and write, and if children under age 8 are excluded the figure rises to 40.1%. See P. Kenez (1985), 73.

⁸ The title's production fell rather substantially during the post-revolutionary years compared to what it was in the late Tsarist era: in 1918 to 6000, in 1919 to 3700, and in 1920 to 3326. See P. Kenez (1985), 243.

The government's interventions were driven by an attempt to take control of and bring order to a chaotic situation and led to the creation of a number of regulatory institutions, such as Narkompros, a government department set up in 1917, and its subdivision Galvlit (Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the USSR Council of Ministers) established in 1922 to manage literature and publishing and the polygraphy section established within the VSNKh (The Supreme Soviet of the National Economy) in 1918. Lunacharsky commissioned and Lenin's close acquaintance Bonch-Bruевич developed a grandiose project to exploit the 19th-century Russian literary legacy by issuing massive print runs of classical writers, such as Gogol, Zhukovsky, Nekrasov and Chekhov, and in 1919 editions of these works began to appear with print runs of 50 000–100 000 copies. Disputes over the future of publishing went on constantly, especially between the Moscow Union of Writers and the VSNKh's officials, and although the nationalisation of book production was a gradual process, the establishment of the state publisher Gosizdat in 1919, along with the relatively independent but state-supported *Vsemirnaya Literatura*, a publishing house run by Maxim Gorky (and incorporated into Gosizdat by 1920), represented the key steps towards state and Communist Party control over publishing.⁹ The centralisation of publishing was accompanied by the socialisation of the printing industry, which was completed by the end of 1920.

The principles of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921) which was designed to revive market-driven economic aspects of the underperforming national industry meant for publishing an attempt to prevent the waste of resources by establishing a stronger link between the actual demand of readers and the titles released. Nevertheless, the impact of NEP principles on publishing was limited by the relatively small size of the reading public, high production costs and consequently the high price of books, the shortage of paper and the limited allocation of paper to the private sphere, the use of obsolete printing technology, legal constraints over private publishing, and the continuing dependence of 'independent' publishers on Gosizdat for the approval of titles for publication and for its distribution services. Gosizdat, which at that time was perhaps already the biggest publisher in the world, with the

⁹ While in 1917 state-run companies released just 11.2% of all titles, in 1918 the number rose to 21.5%. The share of private publishers fell from 79.8% to 58.4% during the same period. See P. Kenez (1985), 96.

added function of advancing the mission of national 'enlightenment', maintained a dominant position in the publishing scene. It was the key producer of textbooks and the institution responsible for the national wholesale trade and for the disposal of 'harmful books' in the stock left over from the previous private owners. Although the number of private publishers remained relatively small, and so was their overall share of the market, they were still strong in the humanities (including texts by the significant segment of the intelligentsia unreceptive to the new regime), books for children, and belle lettres, especially translated works.¹⁰ Nevertheless, under the circumstances, some major private publishers chose to leave the country — for example, the St. Petersburg-based publisher A. I. Grzhebin moved his business to Berlin in 1920. His attempts, mainly with the help of Gorky, to maintain links with the Soviet government, which even granted him substantial capital to supply the Soviet market with classical texts (Lermontov, Chekhov), finally ceased in 1923.¹¹ Despite the apparent complexity of applying NEP principles to the economically damaged and politically closely watched area of publishing, they helped to revive the industry in terms of the diversity and the number of titles available on the market.¹²

In this very basic overview of the institutional regulatory processes applied by the Soviet regime, brief mention is warranted at least by the government's active attempt to control and prescribe which texts went into production and distribution or in other words the issue of censorship, a phenomenon that often tends to dominate in accounts of regulated and totalitarian cultures. As already noted, Lenin himself, at least until 1905, was opposed to the explicit violation of freedom of expression. Despite the clearly defined censoring function of Gosizdat, the central publisher, and later of the press bureau at Narkompros, Lunacharsky himself wrote in 1921 that while texts with obviously counter-revolutionary content should be censored and "books for

¹⁰ There were 223 private publishers in 1922 but just 141 two years later, and only 111 in 1923. Also their share in the total production of copies fell from 25% in 1922 to just 5.8% in 1925. See P. Kenez (1985), 240.

¹¹ See Hilde Hardeman, "The Publishing House Z. I. Grzhebin, Petrograd–Moscow–Berlin, 1919–1923," in *Solanus*, Volume 1 (1987): 41–54.

¹² The number of titles started growing again in 1921 (4000), reaching 20,000 in 1925, and finally regaining its pre-war level in 1928 (34,000). See P. Kenez (1985), 243. Just for comparison, however, total production in 1921 Czechoslovakia, with a population of 13.5 million, was 4802 titles. See "Kultura" in Český statistický úřad, http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/kultura_hu (accessed 20 May 2009).

which we have the greatest need” should be prioritised for publication, the views “of the person who draws the conclusion that criticism should be turned into some kind of denunciation and that artistic work should be turned into primitive, revolutionary slogans” were unacceptable.¹³ Leaving aside the self-censorship of potential authors who may have decided not to publish their manuscripts in Soviet Russia at all, in its early years Gosizdat was relatively benevolent in approving texts submitted by private publishers, and in the early 1920s it even published works by Merezhovsky, Berdaev or Bulgakov, as the early Bolsheviks generally had respect for ‘culture’ and the ‘intelligentsia’, who were thus relatively well-supplied with books of interest.¹⁴

A much less favourable situation, however, existed among the ‘common readers’, particularly in rural areas. Peasants lacked the resources to buy books, and the number of public libraries, which were financed out of the district budgets, dropped to half of its pre-war number, suffered from a shortage of qualified staff, and were subject to an enforced but unsystematic purging of ‘counterrevolutionary’ and even ‘outdated agitational’ texts. Books removed from libraries in some cases included not just works by Kant and Plato and religious materials but also highly popular forms of ‘light’ reading, such as adventures stories and romances, which were replaced by political and agitational literature of little interest to rural reader.¹⁵ In the first years after the revolution, the newly instituted command system of book production, especially after the NEP intervention, succeeded to some extent in supplying intellectual readers with the texts they demanded and in ‘protecting’ the population from harmful works, but it clearly failed to offer the right reading materials to satisfy the ‘common readers’.

¹³ Anatoli Vasilievich Lunacharsky, “Svoboda knigi i revoliutsiia” [Freedom of the book and revolution], *Pechat’ i revoliutsiia* 1 (1921), 8. Quoted in P. Kenez (1985), 245.

¹⁴ For example in St. Petersburg Gosizdat turned down just 10 of 190 manuscripts submitted by private publishers in the course of the first three months of 1922, while in Moscow it was 31 out of 813. Quoted in P. Kenez (1985), 246.

¹⁵ In order to demonstrate the inconsistency of the purging processes and the generally dismissive attitude of the new Soviet ‘nobility’ towards the peasants, Kenez refers to a case where, in 1924, Krupskaya, who was then the head of Glavpolitprosvet responsible for the removal of books from libraries, publicly expressed her outrage at one of the lists she was asked to sign which would remove Kant and Plato from village libraries. In an article published in *Pravda* in April 1924 she argued that the presence of “idealist philosophers” in a peasant library is not harmful, for “a man of the masses will never read Kant”, and much more attention should be paid to religious texts instead. P. Kenez (1985), 448.

The radical transformation of a modern notion of publishing, purchasing, and reading books, all of which was traditionally based on a strong connection between demand and supply and, indeed, profit, into a system driven by allocation and regulation required production of knowledge that would both monitor and legitimise the entire experiment. Among the prime candidates for generating knowledge on books and readers was sociology. Perhaps more than any other academic discipline, this field, whose primary mission is to produce and disseminate knowledge about society, was particularly faithful to contemporary political developments and as a result went through a series of dramatic rises and falls.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the leading Soviet sociologist of literature, Vladimir Jakovlevich Kantorovich, continually reminded his readers about a pioneering development in the Soviet sociological study of art and culture, when in 1918 Lenin ordered a special selection of films to be distributed on agitation boats sent out to promote the Communist Party in rural areas, and ordered that observations be taken of what kind of impact the films had on audiences.¹⁷ According to Kantorovich, the new regime that emerged after the Russian

¹⁶ To sum up, after the Stalinist period, during which sociology had been labelled 'a bourgeois science' aimed at deceiving the masses, Soviet sociology emerged in 1956 and enjoyed a period in the 1960s when it more or less flourished academically and when public opinion research represented one of the key areas of enquiry. The 1970s ushered in another period of decline, most explicitly demonstrated in the case of one key sociologist, Yuri Levada, who was fired from Moscow University and stripped of his title as a professor in reaction to his criticism of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. It was not until 1987 that a group of the best Soviet sociologists, headed by Levada, Tatyana Zaslavskaya and others, was allowed to set up the famous, first independent polling research institution – the All-Soviet Center for Public Opinion Studies (VTsIOM). For the history of sociological research in Russia and the Soviet Union in the 20th century, see Elizabeth Weinberg, *Sociology in the Soviet Union and Beyond: Social Enquiry and Social Change* (Aldershot, Hants., England; Burlington, VT., Ashgate Publishing, 2004).

¹⁷ Vladimir Jakovlevich Kantorovich, *Literatura i sociologia*, [Literature and Sociology], (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1984). V. J. Kantorovich, *Literatura i citatel* (*Zametki o sociologii ctenia*), [Literature and the Reader. Notes on Sociology of Reading], (Moscow: Znanie, 1976). Lenin's frequently cited comment about film being "the most important art", supposedly made in 1922 in a discussion with Lunacharsky, was used to justify both support for and the exercise of power over the film industry across the region for decades. However, Lenin's notion of 'film' in his day did not clearly distinguish between feature, documentary and newsreels. It was, however, seen as an important eye-opening medium for the masses, and the major educational weapon of Soviet socialist society which included linguistically and culturally diverse groups of population. This notion was largely associated with TV-style moving pictures conveying simple documentary and propagandistic content accessible to as wide as possible an audience. Lenin called for the 'cinefication' [*kinofikatsiia*] of the countryside

Revolution did not fail to acknowledge the importance of books and knowledge about books for its political revolutionary agenda, and by the middle of 1924, over two hundred studies on reading had already been commissioned by the government and published.¹⁸ Much of the monitoring of Soviet reading was largely driven by what Evgeny Dobrenko, an author of one of the most up-to-date studies of the production and reception of Soviet literature, refers to as ‘the dialectic’ between ‘following the reader’ and ‘guiding the reader’, or in other words between the reader’s activity and prescription.¹⁹ But as Kantorovich also notes, in this case quantity did not mean quality. An almost exclusive focus on the central and surrounding areas of Moscow and the agitational character of the studies rendered the majority of them rather useless in any attempt to answer questions about the mass distribution and reception of printed matter in the young Soviet empire.

The Soviet authorities’ interest in and support for the production of knowledge about books is also evident in the *Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya* (*Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*) of 1973, which contains a two-and-a-half page entry devoted to *knigovedenie* (book sciences).²⁰ This text already reveals, albeit in highly condensed form, many of the dominant features of Soviet discourse on books and the study of books. *Knigovedenie* is defined rather generally as the “complex science of books, which examines the processes of the production, the distribution and the usage of written and printed matter in society”.²¹ The emphasis on the ‘scientific’ nature of this field highlights its social relevance. The *Encyclopaedia* identifies the roots of this field in the Russian *Bibliografia* of the late 18th and early 19th centuries and specifically in the work of Nikolai Mikhailovich Lisovsky (1854–1920), who set up

in particular. It was estimated that in the Volga region alone, i.e. an area through which his wife Krupskaya cruised in the agitational steamer Red Star in 1919 and discovered that a part of the population was not even aware of the existence of the new regime; over 80% of village youth had never seen a film in 1921–1922. There was a hope that with the help of film (distributed through mobile projectors), the peasants would start associating Bolshevism with technology, and thus with the entire process of modernisation and progress. In Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1998), 38. See also P. Kenez (1985), 104–110.

¹⁸ V. J. Kantorovich (1976), 45.

¹⁹ E. Dobrenko (1997), 12.

²⁰ “Knigovedenie”, in *Bol’shaia Sovietskaiia Enciklopedia*, Tom 12 [Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, Vol.12], ‘Kvarner-Kongur’, 3rd edition, (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Eciklopedia, 1973), 337–339.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 337.

the first courses on 'book sciences' at the universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg.²² In a few lines, the *Encyclopaedia* also acknowledges the contribution of Nikolai Aleksandrovich Rubakin (1862–1946) to the psychology of reading, followed, nonetheless, by remarks about how he fell into the trap of "subjective-idealistic approaches" by denying the existence of the "objectively given content of a book".²³

Rubakin was known as the founder of 'biblio-psychology' and performed pioneering research on reading but also established a network of public libraries in pre-revolutionary Russia; Kantorovich also mentions him, but without the accusations of 'idealism'.²⁴ Evgeny Dobrenko, the author of one of the most up-to-date studies on the production and reception of Soviet literature, claims Rubakin was "the first to formulate the basic ideas of the 'aesthetics of reception' in Russia ... that would achieve its great development in the 1960s and 1970s in Germany and then under the influence of poststructuralist ideas would be transformed ... into American reader-response theory".²⁵ Dobrenko actually defines Soviet culture "as a political and aesthetic project *radically focused on the recipient*" and argues that it is impossible to understand Soviet culture and its literature outside of and separate from the 'reading masses', for it was the reader who was determining both the writer and the critic.²⁶ He notes that it was Rubakin who combined the overwhelming interest of post-revolutionary poets, literary historians and critics in readership with the important aspect of real, live contact with the readers in libraries, and suggests that it was the theory of reception that directed the practices in libraries, publishing policy, and consequently the state's 'guidance of reading'.²⁷ The reader-centred notion of book culture dominated not just the Soviet cultural context in general terms, but perhaps even more so the production of knowledge on book-related matters.

According to the *Encyclopaedia*, it was not until the 1920s that works by the leading theoreticians and activists of the Revolution,

²² For a contemporary edition of his bibliographic work, see Nikolai Mikhailovich Lisovsky, *Bibliografiia russkoi periodicheskoi pechati 1703–1900 gg.: (Materialy dlia istorii russkoi zhurnalistiki)*, [Bibliography of Russian Periodicals 1703–1900: Materials on the History of Russian Journalism], (Moscow: Literaturnoe obozrenie, 1995).

²³ Ibid., 337.

²⁴ V. J. Kantorovich (1976), 45.

²⁵ E. Dobrenko (1997), 10.

²⁶ E. Dobrenko (1997), 2, 10.

²⁷ Ibid., 12–13.

such as N. Krupskaya, A. Lunacharsky and M. Gorky, “brought Leninist ideas about the role of a book in socialist society into life”.²⁸ The origins of Russian (and Ukrainian) book history and the establishment of the first research institutes on books also date from the 1920s, and the first book museum was established in 1922. Much of the work produced in the 1930s focused on the class definition of a book and its ideological role in society while subjecting the “bourgeoisie-idealistic and vulgar-sociological conceptions” of books to sharp criticism.²⁹ While the *Encyclopaedia* acknowledged that a book constituted a “multifaceted functional structure”, it also stressed the need “to define the place of the book in the series of various means of ideological struggle and communication”.³⁰ It further refers to the period of the 1950s and 1960s, a time when there was a revived interest in the study of book history and major works were released on the subject, such as the two-volume *400 Years of Russian Book Print*.³¹ The 1960s were evidently a key period in the development of book studies, a period when a number of research committees and university departments focusing on books and book studies were established, major conferences on the Soviet book took place, and a number of specialised academic journals on related topics were launched. Centenary celebrations of Lenin’s birth led to the publication of many works that approached the topic of ‘Lenin and the book’ from a variety of angles. What appears to have characterised the Soviet study of books was the considerable scholarly attention devoted to this topic, attention that must have been backed by a reasonable amount of funding set aside for this field, combined with particularly intense political and public concerns about the above-noted social and political role of the book. While the cited *Encyclopaedia* entry clearly did not, and of course could not, cover all the issues relevant to books and book production, it outlined the focus on the book as the conveyor – the subject – of ideas and knowledge and as the object of knowledge production.

Although a more in-depth study of sources would be required in order to reach any final conclusions, it could be said that Soviet research on books was mostly oriented towards the quantitative

²⁸ “Knigovedenie” (1973), 338.

²⁹ Ibid., 338.

³⁰ Ibid., 338.

³¹ Aleksei Alekseevich Sidorov (vol. 1) and Aleksei Ivanovich Nazarov (vol. 2) (eds.), *400 let russkogo knigopechatania: 1564–1964*, [400 Years of Russian Book Print], (Moscow: Nauka, 1964).

aspects of book reception. This focus resulted mainly from the standardised and in most cases prescribed (Marxist) theoretical background of the field, which left only very limited room for qualitative research and interpretative work in general. Clearly, the production of any research results that could be framed as 'alternative' in the eyes of the Soviet authorities or simply could be viewed as lying outside the mainstream had the potential to destroy a researcher's career or at the very least eliminate any chances of promotion. Another noteworthy feature of Soviet research on books and reading is that, even though most of the studies focused on the reception of *literary* texts, rather than books in general terms, there was little or no attempt to relate the subject of study to Soviet literary and linguistic theory. Although there were some exceptions, such as Kantorovich's random references to Lotman,³² references to theorists like Nikolai Trubetzkoy, Roman Jakobson, Piotr Bogatyrev, Vladimir Propp, or even Mikhail Bakhtin were missing in studies on reading at this time. Nonetheless (paradoxically) in the 1920s the studies already emphasising the need to consider lower and broader strata of the population in the study of cultural production and reception.³³ Even though the status and availability of their texts did change over time in connection with changes in the political

³² V. J. Kantorovich (1976), 16.

³³ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin's (1895–1975) life and work are, among other things, illustrative of the complex dynamics of 'totalitarian' book production. He wrote several of his major pieces during the post-revolutionary 1920s and later on during the Stalinist 1930s, when he spent six years in exile in Kazakhstan. While only a few texts were released in his name during this period (i.e. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, 1929), other manuscripts were suppressed or lost, sometimes by chance and sometimes owing to the intervention of his political and academic enemies, and publication of some of his works was 'delayed' for decades. For example, his famous work on Rabelais, written in the 1930s, was only published for the first time in Russia in 1965. Although his work was already relatively available at the time when most of the major empirical surveys of reading were being conducted, it was apparently of little or no interest to researchers on contemporary book culture. His focus on popular humour, folk culture, laughter, carnival, and the grotesque, which was perhaps more about the erosion of the ideals of the Russian Revolution than about European Renaissance literature, did not fit with the interpretative frameworks of empirical studies on the achievements in the reading patterns of the Soviet population. For accounts of Bakhtin's life, see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Michael Holquist, "Introduction", in Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), xv–xxxiii. Bakhtin was introduced into the English-speaking academic context through the first English translation by Helene Iswolsky, which was published in 1968 under the title *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge: MIT Press).

climate, and some of these scholars were more ideologically acceptable (Bogatyrev, Propp) than others (exiled Jakobson and Trubetzkoy), their ideas were largely absent from the interpretative frameworks of studies on books and reading.

Soviet scholarship, including those parts of it focused on the subject of printed matter, did not escape the wave of empiricism that has been sweeping the world since the 1950s and in particular the obsession with the invasion of leisure time into the everyday life of the population.³⁴ Leisure-time issues occupied the attention of Soviet researchers despite the fact that the amount of leisure time, measured in GDP terms, considerably lagged behind that of the West. Among leisure-time topics, the category of 'taste' in cultural reception particularly attracted the attention of Soviet scholars, at least since the 1960s.³⁵ Various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and library sciences, addressed topics related to reading and leisure time, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, and they applied one of two basic approaches. One approach focused on the relationship between the spread of television and reading,³⁶ while the other focused on reading as an indicator of the level of cultural standards among the working class. Kantorovich made a critical summary of some major projects conducted by researchers at V. I. Lenin Library.³⁷ One such project, titled 'The Soviet Reader', was conducted in 1968 and members of the research team that worked on it surveyed nearly 170 libraries all over the Soviet Union, distributed 6000 questionnaires, and studied 1000 library cards records. Despite the massive size of this sample, the Soviet media sharply criticised the project, claiming that the sample was not representative of the structure of Soviet society, and that the results, therefore, failed to offer valid information on reading in contemporary Soviet society, instead providing oversimplified and misleading conclusions.

³⁴ For example, a key methodologically oriented study of culture and leisure time *Sociodynamique de la culture* by A. A. Moles (Paris: La Haye Mouton, 1973) was published in Russian translation already in 1973. See A. A. Mol', *Sociodynamika kul'tury* (Moscow: Progress, 1973).

³⁵ See, for example, Lev Naumovich Kogan, *Chudozhestvennyj vkus: Opyt konkretno-sociologicheskogo issledovania* (Moscow: Mysl', 1966); Al'bina Stepanovna Molchanova, *Na vkus, na cvet: Teoritečeskij ocherk ob estetičeskom vkuse* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966).

³⁶ Lev Naumovich Kogan, ed., *Kul'turnaia deiatelnost' – opyt sociologičeskogo issledovania*. [Cultural Activities – the Experience of Sociological Research], (Moscow: Nauka, 1981).

³⁷ V. J. Kantorovich (1976); V. J. Kantorovic (1984).

One of the best examples of the methodological interest in the recipient/reader is another widely debated large-scale survey that was conducted in 1973 under the title 'Books and Reading in the Life of Small Towns'. This research focused on one sample of respondents – the population of a small Soviet town (i.e. not just library users) – and examined reading habits and preferences in relation to *all* books (not just literary works). It paid special attention to the role of books in the lives of children and youth (divided into four age categories between the ages of 8 and 14) and to their motivations for reading. The research revealed a number of patterns about the way in which young readers in particular decided which books to read, and these patterns tended to transcend the different age groups. Fourteen-year-olds were apparently reading the same texts as twelve-year-olds. Older youth and adults were largely interested in book genres of dubious 'quality', such as mysteries, detective novels, and spy stories, and 38% of the titles cited on their preferred-reading lists were 'low' works that literary critics completely ignored.³⁸ The survey also examined the ability of young people in different age groups to perceive and interpret the aesthetic qualities of texts. The research showed that while 30% of eight-year-olds referred to 'artistic details' in their interpretation of texts, only 7% of ten-year-olds did, and 1% of fourteen-year-olds.³⁹ Kantorovich admitted that the specific stages in a child's biological and emotional development had to be taken into consideration, but he argued that ultimately schools were teaching students to schematise the stories they read and as a result students were not developing a 'desirable' level of skill in textual interpretation.⁴⁰

The younger respondents in the survey, who claimed to have read 'war literature', often in the form of the frequently produced novels about the heroic struggle of the Soviet army during the Second World War, were unable to appreciate the ideological impact of this literature in the same way adult readers were able to. One of the research team members, V. D. Stelmakh, noted somewhat cautiously that while works on the Great Patriotic War ranked among the most popular books borrowed in small-town libraries, some readers were perhaps "unable to understand the work in its ideological-aesthetic complex".⁴¹ In his

³⁸ V. J. Kantorovich (1976), 50.

³⁹ V. J. Kantorovich (1984), 226.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴¹ V. D. Stelmakh, "Study of the Reading of Belles-Lettres," in *Reading Research in the Socialist Countries*. Abridged Papers and Minutes of a Conference in Budapest,

comments on the project, Kantorovich noted that in these books young readers were seeking the same themes of battle, chase, and adventure found in any of their other favourite action stories. By the mid-1970s he was already suggesting that, “perhaps (today’s) children have already outgrown the stories about good pioneers which they are presented with so often”.⁴² It is difficult to say whether it was owing to the research project’s discouraging outcome, to its genuine methodological shortcomings, or perhaps to both, that it provoked a strong critical response. According to Kantorovich, critics attacked the project for the simplified analytical categories applied in the research, the poor clarity of the attempts to classify particular reading groups, and a general backwardness compared to contemporary world developments in empirical methodology. Kantorovich also questioned the representativeness of the research sample and highlighted the lack of sociologically relevant data provided on the surveyed readers, including their social background and the cultural standards of their family backgrounds.⁴³

The special attention that the Soviet regime and its researchers devoted to the issue of reading must also be considered in the context of the situation in Russia up until 1917: just 19.6% of the population (and just 8.6% of the female population) in pre-revolutionary rural Russia were literate, and in the majority of rural regions there would have been just one public library for every thirty to forty thousand – and in some areas up to eighty thousand – inhabitants.⁴⁴ Soviet experts and ideologists regularly quoted such data to testify to the backwardness of pre-revolutionary Russia, as more than anything else this information allowed them to highlight the dramatically progressive achievements of the Soviet regime. References to the bleak pre-Soviet past became a powerful tool of Soviet discourse, and, along with Lenin’s views on the subject, it was frequently applied in the introductory paragraphs of popular and even academic texts on books and reading published in the USSR.

How the communist government was supposed to handle this legacy from the Tsarist era was clearly of great concern to both policy

15–18 October 1974. Centre for Library Science and Methodology. (Budapest: National Széchenyi Library, 1975), 183.

⁴² V. J. Kantorovich (1976), 51.

⁴³ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁴ N. E. Dobrynina, “Citatel’ sovremennogo sovetskogo sela,” [The Reader in a Contemporary Soviet Small Town], in *Sociologia i psichologia ctenia*, [Sociology and Psychology of Reading], (Moscow: Kniga, 1979), 47.

makers and researchers. As one of the researchers who dealt with the geographical factors behind reading habits noted, at the turn of the 20th century Lenin had already commented on the fact that the long distances between settlements, the lack of roads and railroads, and more generally the lack of contact that rural areas had with the cultural, capital, and industrial developments in the cities meant that rural areas remained at a lower level of cultural development.⁴⁵ Leaving aside the almost compulsory references to Lenin, Soviet researchers, who in principle agreed on the gloomy nature of the Tsarist past, found very little available data on what the situation in pre-revolutionary Russia was really like. One of the few pieces of research that managed to provide basic information on these issues was a study by L. Lichkov conducted in 1888–1892, in which he analysed the relationship between the reading habits of peasants and how far they lived from the nearest postal route. Perhaps not surprisingly, he found that, for example, in 73% of the towns located near a postal route 'adults borrow books for reading' and in 73% of those towns people also buy books, while in only 20% of towns located off the main postal track adults were able to read and in 23% of them people were also buying books.⁴⁶ Assuming that postal and communication services were thus important for the development of 'modern civilization' and 'progress', one point is worth noting about these data. Both Lenin's views and Lichkov's research appear to directly contradict Engels's assumptions – fully adopted by Richard D. Altick later on – that an established reading culture existed in rural areas (at least in the 19th-century England), but that this culture was allegedly ruined by modernisation, industrialisation and the relocation of peasants to large cities.

The above-cited research on reading in rural Soviet regions highlighted the positive changes that had taken place since Lichkov first conducted his research and showed that the number of regular readers was increasing, particularly in areas with decent cultural and library facilities. But even in the 1970s, that is, nearly a century later, the reading habits of the population still largely depended on how far readers lived from the city. Ultimately, Soviet studies of the rural population

⁴⁵ M. D. Afanas'iev, "Sviaz ekonomiko-geograficheskikh faktorov s rasprostranennost'yu chtenia na sele," [The Relationship between Economic and Geographic Factors and the Spread of Reading in Small Towns], in *Sociologia i psichologia chtenia* (Moscow: Kniga, 1979), 32.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 33.

drew attention – intentionally or unintentionally – to issues that contradicted the predominantly achievement-oriented discourse on the Soviet Union's (at least according to Dobrenko) reader-centred cultural policy, in particular the issues of book supply and the book market, which were described, very subtly, as the system's major failures. In most research reports on reading, references to these failures are often carefully concealed within generally enthusiastic statements in praise of the achievements of 'socialist reading'. For example, at an international seminar on reading in socialist countries, V. D. Stelmakh cited a survey showing that more than half of all readers in rural areas in the Soviet Union had the experience of being unable to obtain a copy of a book they had been looking for (in both libraries and bookstores).⁴⁷ Similarly, the author of the above-mentioned study on the impact of geographical factors on reading habits claimed that "the [current] book market covers only a small part of rural towns in the USSR". People were able to buy books in just 57% of all the towns included in the research, and just 14% of those towns had a bookstore.⁴⁸ Although the author concluded that the spread and practice of reading in remote areas benefited more from a well-supplied library than a well-developed book market, his data nonetheless speak for themselves. The lowest level of reading activity was found in settlements with fewer than 500 inhabitants, and although Soviet settlement policy led to a decrease in the number of poorly populated locations, in the 1970s they still made up 88% of all settlements and contained 34% of the total rural population.⁴⁹

These more or less cloaked references to the failure of the command book system to provide readers with the reading materials they demanded were by no means exceptional. One of many examples was a study of the Soviet book market in the 1980s, which was published in an anthology tellingly titled *Books and Social Progress*. The author equipped the book with a conventional introduction, in which he cites Lenin's view of books as a source of 'enormous power' and then proceeds to highlight the achievements of the book market in his

⁴⁷ V. D. Stelmakh, "Study of the Reading of Belles-Lettres," in *Reading Research in the Socialist Countries*. Abridged Papers and Minutes of a Conference in Budapest, 15–18 October 1974. Centre for Library Science and Methodology (Budapest: National Széchenyi Library, 1975), 185.

⁴⁸ M. D. Afanas'iev (1979), 45.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

homeland, where "all the richness of Soviet book during the period of advanced socialism is being put into the service of the nation".⁵⁰ Over several pages he celebrates the successes of the local book market, which grew by 16.5% between 1981 and 1983 alone.⁵¹ But occasionally he slips in some much less enthusiastic notes. For example, in reference to the contemporary state of knowledge on the issue of the (otherwise booming) book market he noted that "... very little is being published on the book market in our country, there are no textbooks on a number of book market-related disciplines, there are numerous research projects that have either never been completed or their results have not been applied in practice, and there is no future plan for academic research on the book market".⁵² Sensitive readers would have been able to discern the significance of this statement. As noted above, it was the 'liberation' of the book from the vagaries of the 'market' that was one of the major aims of the Communists' cultural policy. Though the quotation above refers to the regulated 'socialist market', any complaint about a lack of knowledge about that market could have been interpreted as suggesting that, since we know nothing about the market, it could potentially operate on principles that lie outside the control of the central authorities. Moreover, admitting the value of such knowledge for running a book industry could have been interpreted as indirect confirmation of the importance of (at least some) market principles for a thriving book industry, principles whose impact the original notion of centrally controlled cultural production had sought to limit in the first place.

At a seminar in Prague in the mid-1980s, a Soviet researcher presented a paper on current issues in the economy of culture in the USSR. He followed the standard line of celebrating the achievements in the field, highlighting the fact that books were published in 89 languages within the USSR, that there were 350 000 libraries in the USSR at the time, and that 1.5 million people were employed in the sphere of culture alone.⁵³ But while in his view the period of "building

⁵⁰ A. A. Govorov, "Put'i nauchnogo reshenia sovremennykh zadach sovietskoi knizhnoi trgovli," [Ways of Scientific Solutions to the Contemporary Tasks of the Soviet Book Market], in *Kniga i socialnyi progress* [Book and Social Progress], (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 36 [36–43].

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵³ P. I. Šabanov, *Některé aktuální otázky ekonomiky kultury v SSSR*. Přednáška pronesená dne 16. 5. 1983 v Domě sovět. vědy a kult. v Praze, [Some Current Issues

up the socio-material basis that would guarantee the accessibility of culture and arts to the wide range of masses” had been relatively easy, the most difficult task at that time was its control, and that stage of development involved balancing the disproportions that existed between different republics in the Soviet Union.⁵⁴ Questioning how it was possible that, for example, Estonia and Lithuania had thirteen times as many museums as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, he felt that the answer lay in the lack of adequate planning for the development of the material basis in certain countries prior to the revolution, but he made no references to the radically different pre-revolutionary cultural traditions in these countries at all. The author included similar critical notes on the state of other areas of cultural production, such as Soviet theatres, which employed many actors who no longer even dared turn up on stage.⁵⁵ However, the discourse of reading studies changed considerably over the course of the last decades of the Soviet regime. For example, Kantorovich, in his 1976 study of Soviet reading, was still using a rather confrontational rhetoric in order to highlight the dramatic difference between the frequency of reading in the East and in the West, and he concluded his account by citing the Party doctrine.⁵⁶ However, a later edition of the book, published in 1984, has no such ‘politically correct’ references, and instead its conclusion contains more general and politically neutral comments on the limitations of quantitative sociology. Also, ‘healthy criticism’ was part of the prevailing discourse in political and academic texts in the Soviet Union, and it became increasingly visible during the 1980s. Rather than undermining the establishment, the role of such criticism was to support and promote the authorities by showcasing their tolerance in the face of challenges. Nonetheless, occasionally some randomly inserted notes and comments on the ‘real’ state of affairs that diverged considerably from the prescribed and expected viewpoint went well beyond the permissible limits of ‘healthy criticism’. Whether it was references to the

in the Economy of Culture in the USSR. A lecture presented on 16 May 1983 in the House of Soviet Science and Culture in Prague], (Prague: Ústav pro výzkum kultury, 1983), 6–7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁶ Kantorovich remarked that, while the 11% of “competent readers with elaborate reading taste” identified in Soviet small towns may not look like a very high figure, it is still noteworthy compared to the figure of 3–5% that is common in the “capitalistic countries of the West”. V. J. Kantorovich (1976), 58.

inability of young readers to appreciate ideological values of war literature, the undersupplied book market, the lack of knowledge about it, or just the laziness of theatre actors, many of these criticisms seemed to lead to one, perhaps often unintended, conclusion. Through the discourse of achievement and success, a message was leaked that indicated the inability of the centralised system to fully control the arts, culture, and consequently also book production and reception. Concealed beneath layers of 'politically correct' claims, these often almost invisible critical remarks pointed to the failure of planned cultural production and reception to manage itself and most importantly to really respond to readers' demands and thus meet the requirements of the supposedly 'reader-centred' concept of book culture.⁵⁷

As already noted, the discourse and practices of centrally controlled book production and reception in the Soviet Union did not adhere to a single model simply copied in the countries of the Soviet Satellite bloc. They differed significantly in many respects, including their national cultural histories, pre-socialist legacies, and particular political sensitivities and obsessions. Even the very limited selection of texts on books produced during the Cold War period within the Eastern bloc, offers a unique form of testimony. They provide insight into the mechanisms behind the construction of narratives about book-related issues *within* the system, but they also show how these narratives contributed to the legitimacy and reproduction of the centrally controlled book system that was meant to be the object of study. Though all communist regimes were exceedingly fascinated by the power of the printed word and reading, it is difficult to generalise about the kind of knowledge that emerged on books under these regimes.

With regard to the book as an object of study, scholarship on books in the Eastern bloc never generated as much output as, for example, in France or former West Germany, and what was particularly lacking during the Cold War period were comparative historical accounts accessible to an international audience, that is, published in one of the major world languages, like German, English, or French, or even in

⁵⁷ Peter Kenez also addressed the sharp conflict between the 'reader-centred' theory and actual practice of post-revolutionary publishing by suggesting that, at least during the first decade of the new regime, "paradoxically, the 'worker-peasant' state, anxious to educate the underprivileged, in fact, did far better in giving books to the educated than in satisfying the needs of the ordinary workers, especially peasants". See P. Kenez (1985), 245.

Russian.⁵⁸ Beyond specialised publications with limited distribution that were related mainly to librarianship and library sciences, references to the history of books were distributed in a variety of different monographs on social and cultural history, again published predominantly in local languages.⁵⁹ In such studies, the book as an object of enquiry tends to be framed as a relevant but still just complementary topic in discussions of more general socio-political issues, and it was not until the 1990s that dedicated book-related studies began to appear, though still predominantly in individual national languages. Although some specialised debates in the region, especially those among historians discussing pre-20th century printed matter, were reproduced in German and sometimes French scholarly publications, the results of major research projects on contemporary national book histories

⁵⁸ This gap has only recently been partly bridged in a project initiated by Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux and the French research institute CEFRES in Prague. The project, titled "Livre, culture, nationalités", was conducted by a team of historians, most of them based in Central European countries. See Frédéric Barbier, Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, Matthias Middell, István Monok, Éva Ring, and Martin Svatoš, eds., *Livre, culture, nationalités. Contributions à l'histoire de la culture écrite 1650–1918/Vernetztes Europa. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Buchwesens 1650–1918*, (Leipzig: Leipzig Universitätsverlag, 2005). The project results are published in three volumes: Volume One: Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux and Martin Svatoš, eds., *Libri Prohibiti. La Censure dans l'espace habsbourgeois 1650–1850*; Volume Two: Frédéric Barbier, ed., *Est-ouest: Transferts et réceptions dans le monde du livre en Europe (XVIIe-XXe siècles)*; Volume Three: Frédéric Barbier and István Monok, eds., *Les Bibliothèques centrales et la construction des Identités Collectives*.

⁵⁹ At least in the Czech context, references to the domestic book and print history were quite frequently included in monographs and edited collections focused on the national revival. See, for example, Josef Petráň et al., *Počátky českého národního obrození: společnost a kultura v 70. až 90. letech 18. století*, [The Beginnings of Czech National Revival: Society and Culture in the 1780s–1790s], (Prague: Academia, 1990); Josef Kočí, *České národní obrození*, [Czech National Revival], (Prague: Svoboda, 1978); Vladimír Macura, *Znamení zrodu. České národní obrození jako kulturní typ*, [The Sign of Birth. Czech National Revival as a Cultural Type], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1983; second expanded edition Jinočany: H & H 1995). In the 1990s more specialised book-focused studies appeared; for example, a published dissertation by Jiří Pešek, *Měšťanská vzdělanost a kultura v předbělohorských Čechách 1547–1620: všední dny kulturního života*, [Burgher's Scholarship, Learning and Culture in Pre-White-Mountain Bohemia 1547–1620: Everyday Cultural Life], (Prague: Universita Karlova, 1993). On more recent studies, see Josef Vintr and Jana Pleskalová, eds., *Videňský podíl na počátcích českého národního obrození: J.V. Zlobický (1743–1810) a současníci: život, dílo, korespondence = Wiener Anteil an den Anfängen der tschechischen nationalen Erneuerung: J.V. Zlobický (1743–1810) und Zeitgenossen: Leben, Werk, Korrespondenz* (Prague: Academia, 2004), which focuses on the professional career of J. V. Zlobický, a high-ranking official in the Czech registry of the Supreme Court in Vienna, a censor of Czech and Slavonic publications and the first professor of Czech language and literature at Universität Wien.

generally suffered from their limited accessibility on an international level.⁶⁰ A grand edited volume on the history of the Czech book, *Česká kniha v proměnách staletí* (completed in the late 1980s but not published until 1990) attracted much less attention than it deserved, despite containing unique research on early modern book culture in Bohemia.⁶¹ Around a decade after the fall of the Iron Curtain, specialised, intra-regional comparative monographs, such as the study by István György Tóth on the development of literacy among Hungarian peasants between the 16th and 19th centuries, began to appear in English and be published by publishers with international distribution.⁶²

However, many socialist countries have been devoting considerable attention to collecting data on book issues and reading under the

⁶⁰ For example, a major historian of Czech printed matter in the 16th–18th centuries Mirjam Bohatcová (1919–2007), was contributing regularly (1968–1993) to the *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch*, i.e. a major German yearbook focused on book and print history published since 1926. See Bohatcová's bibliography in *Folia historica Bohemica* 13/1990 (Prague: Historický ústav Akademie věd České republiky), 513–523; addenda in: *Sborník k 80. narozeninám Mirjam Bohatcové* [A Festschrift on the Occasion of Mirjam Bohatcová's 80th Birthday] (Prague: Knihovna Akademie věd České republiky, 1999), 375–378. I would like to thank to Dr. Antonín Kostlán of the Institute of Contemporary History Academy of Science, Czech Republic for providing references to the respective resources. A very specialised area of Czech book studies is the issue of the confiscated castle libraries administered (currently 341 libraries with 1, 672, 000 volumes) by the Department of Castle Libraries of the National Museum established in 1954. See, for example, Petr Mašek, "Zámecké knihovny v zemích Koruny české," [Castle Libraries in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown], in: Jitka Radimská, ed., *Opera romantica 1. K výzkumu zámeckých, měšťanských a církevních knihoven-Pour une étude des bibliothèques aristocratiques, bourgeoises et conventuelles*, (České Budějovice: Jihočeská univerzita, 2000), 43–52. For a full bibliography on this matter, see "Literature about the Castle Library Collections in the Czech Lands, Moravia and Silesia," at <http://www.nm.cz/old/knm/litzam.htm> (accessed 20 May 2008). I would like to thank to Dr. Petr Mašek, head of the Department of Castle Libraries, for a series of consultations during summer and autumn of 2005.

⁶¹ Mirjam Bohatcová, ed., *Česká kniha v proměnách staletí*, [The Czech Book in the Changing Centuries], Prague: Panorama 1990). This book was 'unlucky', not just owing to the rhetoric in defence of 'socialist culture' it still contained in some parts, but also because in a sense it got slightly lost in the local publishing boom in the immediate post-revolutionary period and thus never received a proper review in any academic forum, either domestic or international.

⁶² István György Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe* (Budapest, New York, CEU Press, 2000). Originally published in Hungarian in 1996, the book is based on research in Hungarian archives and in archives in neighbouring countries. It does not cover the entire region mentioned in the title and instead it focuses mainly on the multiethnic (Hungarian, German, and Croatian) and religiously diverse (Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist) region of Vas County on Hungary's western border with Austria. For a review of the book, see, for example, James P. Niessen, "Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe," *Libraries & Culture* 37/2 (2002), 192–194.

command system dating as far back as the 1960s. Like in the Soviet Union, this academic development was to a large extent connected with the scholarly and political interest in leisure time and tastes. It could be argued that the design, topics and methodology of many such research projects, and the ideologically tainted motives behind them, represented a dubious attempt to provide evidence of the 'cultured' and 'advanced' nature of socialist society. Nevertheless, the data they generated are now often the only source of information on command-era books and reading. An analysis of the intra-regional intellectual dynamics, particularly from the perspective of book studies, would warrant at least a monograph on its own. Here there is just room to provide some indication of the variety of approaches to the study of books that existed in a region often generally characterised by the stereotype of 'sameness' dictated by Marxist ideology. As in many other areas of intellectual or social activity, with regard to book-related research it would be naïve to expect any uniform structure or shared intellectual tradition throughout the region. The role of printed matter in the 'historical struggle' of society for 'better tomorrows' was certainly the object of considerable attention in all former socialist countries, and some of them even established institutes to focus specifically on the study of reading habits and print culture, but the turns this research took varied considerably at both the theoretical and the empirical level.

As one of the many examples of a theoretical stream, at least a brief reference should be made to the scholarship on textual production and reception at Das Zentralinstitut für Literaturgeschichte an der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR (Central Institute of Literary History of the Academy of Sciences of the GDR) established in 1969. Robert Von Hallberg, for example, made references to the Institute in order to demonstrate that East German professional organisations did not just simply "enforce particular kinds of conformity" but also "seemed to have rendered intellectual life devastatingly predictable", but it nonetheless appeared to be a rather unique centre of scholarship among institutions of this kind in Eastern Europe.⁶³ Despite administrative interventions resulting from Party politics that, like elsewhere

⁶³ Robert von Hallberg, ed., *Literary Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State Professionalism and Conformity in the GDR* (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 1996), 317. See also Randall L. Bytwerk, *Bending Spines: the Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic* (East Lansing, MI: MSU Press, 2004).

in the region, damaged many long-term projects or at least required that they be continuously 're-worked', the institute's team, which included for example Wolfgang Thierse, the future President of the Bundestag (1998–2005), drew on the tradition of the Prague Linguistic Circle and the Konstanz school of receptive aesthetics (W. Iser, H. R. Jauss).⁶⁴ Under the umbrella of 'Marxism', it managed to bring together the heterogeneous expertise of scholars in the fields of German, Slavonic, or English studies, combine the interdisciplinary perspectives of sociology, certain concepts in the history of ideas (*Geistesgeschichte*), structuralism, and comparative literature, and embed rather diverse traditions, like that of György Lukács, as well as controversial German theoreticians and intellectuals such as Hans Mayer, Gerhard Scholz, or Bertold Brecht.⁶⁵

In the late 1970s and early 1980s another group of East German literary scholars affiliated with the Department of Germanistik und Kunstwissenschaften (German studies, aesthetics and art history) at Martin-Luther-Universität in Halle tried to rehabilitate the sociology of literature with a focus on the reception side of the literary process.⁶⁶ The application of ideological issues to textual reception led East German researchers to distinguish between the concepts of *Kaufpropaganda* and *Lesepropaganda*, a distinction that was developed in an effort to emphasise the differences between the principles dominant in the field of book reception and book selling in the former GDR and BDR.⁶⁷ The German East-West relationship provided a very fruitful context for all kinds of comparative exercises, making it possible to highlight (and praise) the advantages of the 'socialist' conception of a book culture free of economic interests. This conception was

⁶⁴ More consistent development of such traditions would have been deemed unacceptable, for example, in post-1968 Czechoslovakia, where any theoretical school supposedly rooted in 'bourgeois structuralism' would have been accused of contradicting the dominant, largely dogmatic Marxist approaches. Some of the Institute's production was, however, also available to Czech scholars at Charles University Library, including the *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956–1991).

⁶⁵ For the Institute's history see Petra Boden und Dorothea Böck, eds., *Modernisierung ohne Moderne Das Zentralinstitut für Literaturgeschichte an der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* (1969–1991), (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 2004). See also Reiner Rosenberg, "Literaturwissenschaftliche Germanistik in der DDR," in Christoph König, ed., *Germanistik in Mittel- und Osteuropa, 1945–1992*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 41–50.

⁶⁶ For the major research output of this team, see Dietrich Sommer, et al., eds., *Funktion und Wirkung. Soziologische Untersuchungen zur Literatur und Kunst* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag 1978).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 416.

usually defended and supported with informative references to empirical research from West German questionnaire surveys, which, for example, demonstrated the overwhelming preoccupation with book prices among Western book buyers, a concern barely noticeable among their GDR counterparts. 'Hard data' of this kind then became a useful tool for substantiating the success of the command system of book production and reception.⁶⁸

The relatively liberal intellectual and academic environment in Poland during most stages of the Cold War provided a relatively fertile space for research on culture, at least in comparison with other countries in the Soviet satellite region. Polish research did not focus just on the patterns of reception of certain (literary) genres, as was common in other countries in the region, but also attempted to grasp the reception of *books*, defined more broadly, and not exclusively in terms of 'high literature'. The rich Polish tradition of book studies and particularly reading research cannot be separated from the equally rich tradition of sociology of literature, whose key representatives, such as the controversial figure of Stefan Żółkowski, were never totally isolated from contemporary European theoretical developments. Their focus on so-called extra-literary aspects of textual communication, and particularly on the role of the reader in the 'literary process', evolved not just under the influence of works by Mikhail Bakhtin and the Tartu school of semiotics, but also under the influence of French theorists like Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss, and they combined this with a strong appreciation for the legacy of the Prague School, especially the work of Felix Vodička.

The post-war Polish intellectual environment was characterised by dynamic interaction between the defenders of internal textual analyses (poetics, structuralism) and those dealing with the external, that is, the social and sociological aspects of textual production and reception.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ According to this survey, 30% of respondents completed the open-ended statement "Frau Schulze would like to buy books more often, but she is frightened of the bookshop because ..." with a response that "books are too expensive" and 18% stated that the "selection is too big". However, in a survey in the GDR, in response to the question "What stops you from going into a bookshop?" just 2% (!) replied "I have no money/books are too expensive". In D. Sommer (1978), 414.

⁶⁹ For one of the most discussions of this polarity, see the volume of essays edited by Janusz Sławiński, *Problemy socjologii literatury*, [Problems of Sociology of Literature], (Warsaw: Ossolineum, 1971). For a brief but comprehensive account of post-war Polish literary theory and particularly its interest in social aspects of literary communication (and an account that was also a valuable resource for my notes below),

The first, textually oriented stream was represented, for example, by Janusz Sławiński, who argued against sociological determinism in order to emphasise the 'literary nature' of a text, that is, a specific set of features that allow us to perceive a text as 'literary'. He used the term 'literary culture', which was defined by a commonly shared system of meanings and experiences that enable a certain group, understood as the 'literary public' (i.e. authors, critics and readers), to communicate through the medium of literary texts. One of his followers, Michał Głowiński, identified a set of receptive codes and styles that generate specific connotations connected to a particular 'literary culture', and in his conception such connotations are responsible for defining a certain text as 'literary' within that culture. A key defender of sociologically oriented trends, Żółkiewski himself provided the theoretical background to much of the empirical reading research conducted under his supervision at the Instytut Badań Literackich (IBL – Institute for Literary Studies) at the Polish Academy of Sciences. He not only significantly contributed to the establishment of the *Instytut* in 1948, but also served as its first director.⁷⁰ At the heart of his theoretical conception, most consistently presented in his study *Kultura literacka (1918–1932)*, was a concern with 'literary culture', largely inspired

see Petr Šámal, "K historii pojmu literární kultura. Poznámky z polské literární vědy," [The History of the Notion of Literary Culture. Notes on Polish Literary Scholarship], in *Česká literatura* 4 (2005), 541–555. I would like to thank one of the editors of *Česká literatura*, Pavel Janáček, for bringing this essay to my attention. Šámal's interest in contemporary Polish literary scholarship would seem to be evidence of its consistently respected and paramount position in the intra-regional (i.e. within Eastern Europe) academic environment.

⁷⁰ A literary scholar and cultural journalist (1911–1991), he was – at least during the first post-1948 decades – an active supporter of the Polish Communist regime and as such served in posts such as the Academic Secretary of the Polish Academy of Sciences (1953–1955) and as the Minister of Education (1956–1959) and was a member of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party (RZRP). After the events in Poland in 1968 he was expelled from high politics. In the remaining decades of his life he was a key figure in the Polish and, in more general terms it could be said, East European sociology of literature. In the IBL, and under the protective wings of the Academy of Sciences, which served as a kind of shelter for those academics who for political reasons were unable to teach at the university, he managed to build up a team of professionals that conducted large-scale research projects on reading. Intellectually, he himself went through the – for an East European intellectual more or less traditional – experience of evolving from a rather dogmatic pro-Communist position to a more 'liberal' conception of the literary text, like that of Lukács and Goldmann. This turn was reflected in his pioneering work *Semiotika a kultura* [Semiotics and Culture], first published in a Slovak translation of the manuscript in Bratislava in 1969. See P. Šámal (2005), 542–543.

by French cultural anthropology and the work of Yuri Lotman.⁷¹ Żółkiewski was interested in anything that goes beyond the very content of the text and its aesthetic and literary qualities, and in the communication processes that take place 'outside the text', in particular the social context and issues such as the social role of authors and their audiences. The focus on statistical data and social and economic history was intended to guarantee the 'scientific nature' of his field of study and was combined with a traditional structuralist suspicion of authors' biographies as a relevant resource of information.⁷² In *Kultura literacka* he examined the post-First World War socio-economic development in Poland and its impact on the transformation of local cultural and literary institutions, including, for example, the printing industry and the periodicals market, in order to stress and define the 'mass' features that characterise contemporary literary culture.

Following his historical analyses, Żółkiewski then identified a set of hierarchical social circuits within which particular texts circulate and which differ in relation to the specific social function of the circulating texts and to the specific needs of reading audiences that the texts satisfy. Although Żółkiewski tried to further elaborate his own key conceptual framework in later works, his major contribution was not just the institutionalisation of sociology of literature in the Polish academic context, but also the generation of interest in the 'common reader' and in the texts traditionally associated with such readers, like trash literature and pulp fiction. In the work of his followers, the notions of 'common' and 'popular' reading were also gradually losing their axiological flavour and were transformed into legitimate critical concepts of social and cultural analyses. A certain shift from the examination of 'literary culture' towards 'book culture' could be observed among many of his younger colleagues, including Oskar Czarnik in his work on the institutions of Polish post-war literature, Stanisław Kondek on the publishing industry and the state-controlled publishing of the 1950s, or Czesław Hernas's study of popular literature.⁷³ It is perhaps no accident

⁷¹ Stefan Żółkiewski, *Kultura literacka*, [Literary Culture], (Warsaw: Zakł. Nar. im. Ossolińskich, 1973).

⁷² P. Śamal (2005), 547.

⁷³ Oskar Stanisław Czarnik, *Miedzy dwoma sierpniami: polska kultura literacka w latach 1944–1980*, [Between Two Augusts: Polish Literary Culture 1944–1980], (Warsaw: 'Wiedza Powszechna', 1993); Stanisław Adam Kondek, *Papierowa rewolucja: oficjalny obieg książek w Polsce w latach 1948–1955*, [The Paper Revolution: The Official Circulation of Books in Poland 1948–1955], (Warsaw: Biblioteka

that the country's major research centre devoted to the institutional background of literary processes, the Instytut Książki i Czytelnictwa (Institute for the Book and Readership) is currently affiliated with the Polish National Library, i.e. *outside* the institution of literary scholarship itself.

The Instytut – at present perhaps the most important centre for the study of Polish books and their reception – was established in 1954–1955 and currently includes three major sections focusing on reading research, the history of reading and books, and library sciences. For example, just a brief look at the analytical texts published by the Section for the Study of the History of Readership, which was set up in 1984, and its six-volume series on book institutions and the reading public, edited by Janusz Kostecki, suggests the richness of topics covered by the research team, which was almost unparalleled in the region of East and Central Europe.⁷⁴ The wide range of issues, in terms of both time and space, includes studies of Polish books and reading going back to the early nineteenth century, as well as specialised analytical insights into regional publishing and book circulation in urban areas (Warsaw, Krakow) and the provinces, and insight into the stories of Polish books in, say, Russia and Latvia. As Kostecki himself emphasised, the main purpose of the series was to examine the reading public, its social stratification, the types of selected reading materials, and, most importantly, to ask what happens to reading materials and how and for what purpose are they being used. Such questions are approached from the perspective of institutional analysis, supported by statistical evidence, and the 'extra-institutional' perspective of the communication of meanings that includes a concern with the 'consciousness-related' orientation of readers.⁷⁵

However, what appears to be one of the most noteworthy features of Polish book and readership studies is the high level of *continuity* in

Narodowa. Instytut Książki i Czytelnictwa, 1999); Czesław Hernas, "Potrzeby i metody badania literatury brukowej," [Needs and Methods of Research on Popular Literature], in Stefan Żółkiewski and Maryla Hopfinger, eds., *O współczesnej kulturze literackiej* [On Contemporary Literary Culture], (Warsaw: Zakł. Nar. im. Ossolińskich. Polska Akademia Nauk. Instytut Badań Literackich, 1973), 15–45.

⁷⁴ Janusz Kostecki, ed., *Instytucje - publiczność - sytuacje lektury: studia z historii czytelnictwa*. T. 1–6, [Institutions – the Public – Situations of Reading: Studies of the History of Readership], (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa. Instytut Książki i Czytelnictwa, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1997).

⁷⁵ Janusz Kostecki, 'Introduction' in J. Kostecki, (1989), Volume 1, 7–10; J. Kostecki, "Introduction," in J. Kostecki (1990), Volume 2, 7–9.

terms of both research topics and research staff. Despite the fact that, for example, the first volume of the series quoted above went to print in 1989, and so much of the research behind it would have been conducted under the 'old regime', the discourse and even the focus of reading research studies do not exhibit any major changes.⁷⁶ Among other studies, the Instytut also produced a two-volume series specifically devoted to the issues of book control and the regulation of printing (while apparently avoiding the term censorship in the title) immediately after 1989, but the analytical texts examine variety of periods in book history and thus do not focus exclusively on the Communist era.⁷⁷ Antonina Kłoskowska,⁷⁸ the guru of Polish sociology of culture, noted in her introductory essay to the first volume that not only has the history of the struggle for freedom of expression in Polska Ludowa (People's Poland) passed through various stages, which significantly differed in terms of institutional forms and the strength of political pressure, but the regulation of thought also has a long history, which goes way beyond the post-Second World War period, and evidence of this has been found, for example, in studies on the Tsarist

⁷⁶ Just to summarise: what preceded the Polish 'revolution' of 1989 was an economic decline followed by waves of strikes across the country in April, May, and August 1988. Under these pressures, the Communist government was forced to acknowledge *Solidarność* as a partner in communication, which led to the first talks with its leader Lech Wałęsa on August 31. After these talks broke up in October, new 'round table' negotiations began in February 1989 and led to an agreement for National Assembly elections in April. Following the Communists' failures at the polls and at forming a government, the journalist and *Solidarność* activist Tadeusz Mazowiecki was asked to form a government on August 19, and the Sejm approved him as Prime Minister and approved his cabinet – the first non-Communist government in over forty years – on September 12. For one of the most recent comparative accounts of the East European upheavals of 1989, see Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁷⁷ *Piśmiennictwo - systemy kontroli - obiegi alternatywne*. T. 1–2, [Literature, Systems of Control, Alternative Circulation], edited by Janusz Kostecki and Alina Brodzka (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa. Instytut Książki i Czytelnictwa, 1992). These volumes include papers presented at the conference "Piśmiennictwo – systemy kontroli – obiegi alternatywne" held at the National Library on 10–13 December 1990.

⁷⁸ Antonina Kłoskowska, *Socjologia kultury*, [Sociology of Culture], (Warsaw: PWN, 1981). One of the last projects worked on by Kłoskowska (1919–2001), who served, among other things, as head of the Department of Sociology of Culture at Warsaw University for over twenty years, was a study of the national and cultural identity of the borderland regions, which was based on extensive empirical research on young intellectuals among ethnic minorities in Poland, Silesia, Ukraine, and Belarus. See A. Kłoskowska, *National Cultures at the Grass-Root Level* (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2000).

policing of the Polish underground and illegal textual production in areas occupied by the Russians in the 19th century.⁷⁹

The Polish intellectual context has also been enriched by the continuous production of translations, which has facilitated more or less up-to-date access to current major 'Western' and 'Eastern' theoretical developments. As early as the 1970s and 1980s, Polish students and academics were able to read Polish translations of the work of Barthes, Escarpit, and Foucault, that is, representatives of contemporary 'Western' social and cultural theory.⁸⁰ Edited volumes of studies in the sociology of culture and literature have also long been available, and not just to the Polish public, as Polish translations served as a unique source of information on 'Western' social and cultural theory for Czech and Slovak scholars at a time when the original texts were essentially unobtainable from local libraries and Czech translations of key texts did not exist.⁸¹

In fact, one of the most comprehensive accounts of Czechoslovak reading research was written in Polish in the late 1970s. It is perhaps fair to say that, with the exception of an annotated bibliography of works on reading by Jaromír Jedlička and Ladislav Kurka, such an exhaustive overview of nearly all local empirical and theoretical works, including periodical research reports and specialised studies printed in professional periodicals, had no real equivalent even in Czechoslovakia.⁸² The author, Maria Walentynowicz, shows a great deal of admiration for the analytical reflection of reading-related issues in Czechoslovakia, despite the fact that it was in no way comparable to the range and quality of work conducted in this sphere in Poland. Among other things, she highlights a number of projects conducted in Slovakia and argues that it was Slovak researchers who, in their work on reading patterns in villages, conducted pioneering reading research

⁷⁹ Antonina Kłoskowska, "Kontrola myśli i wolność symboliczna," [Thought Control and Symbolic Freedom] in *Piśmiennictwo ...*, (1992), 9–19.

⁸⁰ Robert Escarpit's *La révolution du livre*, for example, was published in Polish translation already in 1969, Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1977 and *Madness and Civilization* in 1987. None of these texts existed in Czech at that time.

⁸¹ Andryej Mencwel, ed., *W kręgu socjologii literatury: antologia tekstów zagranicznych*, [In the Circle of Sociology of Literature: An Anthology of Foreign Texts], Vols. I and II, (Warsaw: Państw. Instytut Wydawniczy, 1977).

⁸² Jaromír Jedlička and Ladislav Kurka, *Výzkum vztahu knihy a čtenáře v ČSSR*, [Research of the Relation Between Book and the Reader in ČSSR], (Prague: Československé ústředí knižní kultury, 1966).

in post-war Czechoslovakia, mainly initiated by a “slower tempo of cultural revolution in this area”.⁸³ She shows exceptional interest in the theoretical aspects of reading among Czechoslovak researchers, focusing particularly on the psychology of reading,⁸⁴ and she refers to a number of texts on highly specialised areas, such as the reading habits of ill and mentally disabled people, which began appearing as early as the 1950s.

Walentynowicz also repeatedly stresses the primary position occupied by Czech readers among readers in Europe in a number of book-related aspects. For example, according to surveys conducted in the 1960s, just 21% of the adult population of Czech cities did not buy at least one book during one year, while in Holland 53% and in West Germany 68.5% of adults claimed they had not bought a book in the past four months. Similarly, with regard to personal libraries, while 3% of Czechs living in cities and 6% of those in rural areas did not own any books at home, among the Dutch the figure was 11% and among West Germans 28%. In Poland the figure was as high as 49.5% among the urban population and 42.9% in the villages.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, Walentynowicz’s list of the key features of Czechoslovak reading research (i.e. in reference to the 1970s) could also be read as a critical account of tasks that were just partially achieved. These included balancing the differences between Czech and Slovak ‘reading activities’, with the latter still at a somewhat lower level, advancing the development of professional periodicals and institutions devoted to reading research, the development of research methodology, and initiation of field work planned on a national scale, particularly in connection with the social role of libraries, and the lack of a synthesis of projects conducted to date.⁸⁶

A key Hungarian research institution for book studies and reading was the Centre for Library Science and Methodology at the National Széchényi Library. The centre, which in 2000 became the Hungarian Library Institute, was established in 1959 to facilitate the work of the local public library network and to conduct theoretical and empirical

⁸³ Maria Walentynowicz, *Badania nad Czytelnictwem w Czechosłowacji*, [Reading Research in Czechoslovakia], (Warsaw and Poznań: PWN, 1977), 99.

⁸⁴ Among the most influential works was Milan Nakonečný’s two-volume study *Psychologie čtenáře 1–2* [Psychology of the Reader, Vols. 1–2], (Prague: ÚDA, 1965–1966).

⁸⁵ M. Walentynowicz (1977), 107.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

research and professional and methodological training and to prepare data and concepts for use in policy and decision-making at the Ministry of Culture.⁸⁷ For several years the centre was headed by István Kamarás, a sociologist of culture and religion, who, unlike many of his colleagues in the region, managed to make the results of his research team's work available to the international scholarly community.⁸⁸ Although, for understandable reasons, this research unit focused mostly on library users, it also attempted to identify the dominant tendencies in readership and how they changed over time. The results of the team's research revealed the existence of some trends that would not have pleased the designers of the centrally controlled cultural policy, tendencies that at the time would have been considered alarming, such as the general decrease in the amount of time the adult population spent reading, despite the increasing numbers of books bought during the 1960s–1970s. Other noteworthy trends were identified, too, such as the growing interest in non-fiction texts and in particular an increasing number of female readers.⁸⁹

A brief look at the research reports the team was producing in the 1980s suggests that Hungarian researchers were particularly interested in the reading habits of young people and school children, and that these projects produced some rather disturbing results. Compared to other leisure activities, such as sports, listening to music, or going out

⁸⁷ It also currently houses one of the most extensive European collections of materials on library science and book history, which covers not just Hungarian publications since the mid-19th century, but also an almost full collection of materials produced on the given subject in the former Soviet Union and other socialist countries in the period between 1950 and 1990. See "Hungarian Library Institute," at <http://www.ki.oszk.hu/hli2.html#researchandanalysis> (accessed 15 January 2006).

⁸⁸ His publications in English on related topics include István Kamarás, *Reading Workers and Literature: Summary* (Budapest: National Széchényi Library Centre for Library Science and Methodology, 1981), and István Kamarás and Attila Nagy, "Reading Research in Hungary," *Journal of Research in Reading* 4/2 (1981), 81–91. The centre has compiled a bibliography, *Reading Research in Hungary 1960–1977: Bibliography*, (Budapest: National Széchényi Library Centre for Library Science and Methodology, 1977), and also regularly produces collections of research reports in English: *Reading Research in the Centre for Library Science and Methodology 1968–1977, 1977–1980 and 1981–1985*, (Budapest: National Széchényi Library Centre for Library Science and Methodology, 1977, 1980, 1986). For his more recent work in the field of religious studies, see, for example, "Catholic Parochial Work in Hungary in the Period of Systemic Change," in Irena Borowik and Tomka Miklós, eds., *Religion and Social Change in Post-Communist Europe* (Krakow: Zakład wydawniczy NOMOS, 2001), 81–92.

⁸⁹ I. Kamarás and A. Nagy (1981), 81–91.

with friends, reading fiction had decreased substantially within just two generations, so that, while in 1968, 15–18 year-old students rated reading as their number one leisure activity, in 1983 reading fiction ranked ninth; ironically, watching television remained in seventh place.⁹⁰ Not only did youngsters growing up in the 1970s and 1980s read less than their parents had twenty or thirty years earlier, but something Hungarian scholars referred to as the “infantilisation” of taste and reading interests was also occurring and could be observed among readers as young as 10–14 years old. While in the mid-1960s young Hungarian readers were reading “adult romantic and classic realist literature”, in the mid-1980s that literature was being increasingly pushed aside by “adolescent literature of questionable value” and by television, which began to supplant books as the “windows and doors into the life of older generations”.⁹¹

In the 1980s infantilisation was also identified in older age groups (15–18), where it was accompanied by an overall decline in the prestige of reading and a radical decline of interest in poetry. At the same time, non-fiction literature increased in popularity among the younger generations. Reading also became a significant tool of social differentiation. According to Hungarian surveys, ‘grammar school’ students not only read more and more often than those who attended vocational training schools, but they also read differently. Similarly, while 42% of grammar school students used more than one library, only 7% of students of vocational schools claimed the same.⁹² Considerable changes were noted in reading behaviour among adults, too. So although the number of ‘book readers’ actually increased slightly

⁹⁰ Attila Nagy, “Reading Culture of the 15–18 Year Olds,” in *Reading Research in the Centre for Library Science and Methodology 1981–1985* (Budapest: National Széchényi Library Centre for Library Science and Methodology 1986), 13.

⁹¹ Attila Nagy, “On the Reading Culture of the 10–14 Year Olds,” in *Reading Research ...* (1986), 7.

⁹² Attila Nagy, “Reading Culture of the 15–18 Year Olds,” in *Reading Research ...* (1986), 20. Like in Czech society, here the distinction between ‘grammar schools’ and ‘vocational schools’ has its roots in the education system of the Habsburg monarchy. The ‘grammar school’ and particularly the ‘gymnasium’, which specialised in education in the humanities, were selective four-year schools attended after completion of compulsory elementary education, i.e. from the ages of 15 to 18, and concluded with an abitur (approximately the equivalent of A-levels), which was a prerequisite for admission to university or any form of higher education. The much less selective ‘vocational schools’ offered just a professional training diploma (e.g. as a butcher, car mechanic, or waiter) and the graduates of these schools usually started working immediately after graduating with no expectation of further education.

between the mid-1960s and late 1970s (up from 59% in 1964 to 61% in 1978), the proportion of 'frequent readers' decreased from 23% to 17% during the same period. Like elsewhere in the world, figures on reading were often compared to the amount of time the population spent watching television. Hungarian researchers found that even in the 1970s, 55% of adults (over the age of 20) were watching TV for two or three hours every day, and they found these figures 'overwhelmingly high' compared to the figure of 64% for book readers and 17% for 'regular readers'.⁹³

One of the most important trends that the Hungarian researchers observed was the controversial relationship between the improved living conditions of the local population and their reading habits, both across generations and across various urban and rural areas. One of their projects compared data gathered in the mid-1960s on the reading habits of 13 and 14-year-old primary school children in larger villages (8500 inhabitants) with data collected on the same sample twenty years later, when the respondents were in their thirties. The researchers concluded that while the thirty-something respondents had "financial and lodging conditions beyond the average level, their levels of qualification were beyond the average ... in their adulthood – comparing to their childhood – their inclination for reading has significantly decreased".⁹⁴ This trend could to some extent be ascribed to the decreased amount of time available for reading (fiction) observed among the adult population in other social and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, even in this project the Hungarian analysts highlighted the continued infantilisation of the local population's literary taste and saw it as yet another ironic consequence of rising living standards.

Similar trends were identified in another Hungarian project focusing on the rural population in the 1970s, which was commissioned by the Association of Hungarian Book Publishers and Booksellers Market Research Group. As part of the project a questionnaire survey was conducted among 1000 families (3177 members) in 1971, and in 1978 the survey was repeated in interviews with 604 members of 195 families.⁹⁵ One of the study's major conclusions was that, while better material

⁹³ Ferenc Gereben, "Reading Habits and the family Library," in *Reading Research ...* (1986), 25.

⁹⁴ István Bacscai et al., 'Changes in Reading Habits at Bacsalmás,' in *Reading Research ...* (1986), 21.

⁹⁵ Ferenc Gereben, "Reading and Book-Purchasing Habits of the Rural Population: Findings of Two-Stage Survey," in *Reading Research ...* (1986), 30.

conditions, including more disposable income, allowed people to buy more books and considerably expand their home libraries, the 'stagnation and recession' of reading, mainly a decline in its frequency and 'quality', was observed in "all areas needing not only the financial means and desire for culture but also a considerable expenditure of energy and time".⁹⁶

Another project conducted by Kamarás's research team in the Soviet bloc was a unique large-scale study of the reception of one particular text: Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.⁹⁷ From the perspective of literary criticism, this novel represents a congenial mixture of intense narration, mystery, and Russian mysticism, combined with references to antiquity, early Christianity and modern history, a story inhabited by a wide range of metaphorically constructed and grotesque characters. From the perspective of reception, it could be said, in somewhat simplified terms, that Bulgakov's extraordinary narrative skills make this a highly readable text, accessible to reading audiences with different levels of reading comprehension. At the same time, the multi-dimensional character of the work's content, which lacks nothing in humour and irony, allows an almost unlimited amount of space for interpretations about, among other things, the obscure and brutal nature of totalitarian regimes.⁹⁸ Despite the difficulties that accompanied its publication, not just in Russia but across the Eastern bloc, including the former Czechoslovakia, or perhaps precisely because of them, this book gained immense popularity throughout the region and was celebrated by both critics and readers. In Hungary alone seven

⁹⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁹⁷ István Kamarás, *Follow Me, Reader! (Reception, Interpretation and Influence of Bulgakov's Master and Margarita in Hungary)* (Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, 1985), 2. An abstract of the research report is also included under the same title, in *Reading Research ...* (1986), 45–63.

⁹⁸ The publishing history of the text also presents a fascinating reference to the world of books in the specific totalitarian context. Mikhail Afanasievich Bulgakov (1891–1940), a journalist, drama writer, and novelist, studied and practised medicine for several years before he began his career in writing and the theatre. Although from 1928 to his death he worked on several versions of the novel, as well as several other texts, he never saw it published in his lifetime. The first, considerably censored edition came out in 1966–1967 in the journal 'Moskva'. The deleted sections of the text were circulated in samizdat, and complete uncensored versions of the book were released in Paris and Germany. It was not until 1973 that the fifth and complete version of the text was published in Russian in Russia. A new (sixth) edition based on the study of all available materials came out in 1989. See, for example, 'Master and Margarita' in http://cr.middlebury.edu/public/russian/Bulgakov/public_html/RUeditions.html, accessed 3 May 2008.

editions of the book were published between 1969 and 1984, with a total print run of 315 000 copies, which, for example, was more than the print runs of the Hungarian translation of Alex Haley's *Roots* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.⁹⁹ Every fifth household in Budapest had a copy of the book in the family library, but it also generated a wave of 'by-products', including a radio production (made in 1972, but not broadcast until 1976) and a stage production. Later on, in the 1980s, numerous reviews and critical studies on the novel emerged, and its impact went beyond the book world. A local pop-star sang a song about Margarita, the book became the topic of school discussions and a TV-quiz, the novel became a motif in a church oratorio, and its characters could be found in contemporary Hungarian poetry, while some phrases from the novel became a part of everyday language as common expressions.¹⁰⁰

Had this occurred a couple of decades later, in the environment of a re-established market-oriented culture, the multi-media success of the book could easily have been seen as the result of skilfully orchestrated merchandising. But in state-socialist Hungary, such phenomena inevitably sparked concern and curiosity, particularly on the part of experts in the field of reading and book studies. Kamarás's team conducted a complex research project designed to look at textual interpretation patterns, and they used this novel to examine the attitudes of readers and the effect of different institutions (literary criticism) and even individuals on the process of communication with a (literary) text. The team came up with an apparently simple but potentially alarming answer to the principal question of what was the secret behind the novel's success. In their view the novel was filling a gap, making up for the absence of certain information and experiences in Hungarian society. It spurred an interest in religion, the Bible, and "transcendental" issues and addressed certain kinds of taboos, and it also provided people with an opportunity to articulate their need to interpret their own life experiences and existence, something that was evidently lacking in the everyday life of socialist society.¹⁰¹ Kamarás made one important additional point by suggesting that it was impossible to define Bulgakov readers as a group in traditional sociological terms or according to specific social and professional characteristics. What defined this group

⁹⁹ I. Kamarás (1985), 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 41.

was precisely the existence of an empty space in their lives, which Bulgakov's text identified and purported to fill.

While it can be assumed that the process of infantilisation was not unique to the command-culture context, there is a very judgemental and in a way prescriptive and patronising dimension to the concept, because it still regards ('good'!) books as a special and as the preferred medium for delivering information. It reserves a unique position for books as the primary tool of communication, despite the rapidly changing landscape of communication technology. Even the 'backward East' experienced technological developments to some extent, albeit within the obvious political and economic restrictions imposed by the command systems of management. However, the references to the growing numbers of non-readers, the decreasing numbers of regular readers, and the 'deterioration' of their literary tastes played a role in the process through which knowledge about 'socialist' society and its centrally controlled system in general was constructed.

Not even in reports published in the second half of the 1980s were these problematic trends in reading explicitly formulated as the failure of the Communist governments, traditionally obsessed with achievements in all spheres of production, including culture. Even internally distributed research reports had of course to be wrapped in the jargon of the 'Marxist approach to cultural research', though that jargon would certainly have been laid on much thinner under Kádár's 'goulash Communism' than, say, in 'normalised' post-1968 Czechoslovakia. Nonetheless, in reports on reading research, which usually just addressed a small group of professionals, it was possible to imply things that were usually missing from the 'pro-progressive' official rhetoric, which tended to ignore the real development in the population's cultural behaviour. It could be said that in this way book-related research projects, and most importantly their results and conclusions, served as a rather silent, and often nearly invisible, tool with which to question the leading principles and achievements of the social revolution, including its regulated textual production and reception, locally propagated as the only 'correct' way to build a better – and that also meant a better-read – society. In other, somewhat stronger, words, such research contributed to undermining the authority of social and cultural engineering and control.

Again, more data and research results would have to be studied in order to arrive at any final conclusions about the knowledge on books and reading produced in the Soviet bloc. Nonetheless, it could be said

that no matter how supportive or critical a study was of the predominant ideology, even the most 'modest' reports on reading research conducted during the Cold War in this area – in explicit or implicit form – made one important point: the 'reading' and the 'learned' community imagined and prescribed by the ideologists of the centrally controlled social and cultural systems simply had limited resemblance to reality. Even centrally controlled (and relatively generously funded) research, founded on the 'correct' ideological outlook, was unable to conceal some of the major – often conflicting and from the perspective of the authorities more disturbing – trends in the development of book production and reception in the so-called advanced socialist society. Among such trends was a certain – perhaps still less statistically significant than in most 'Western' countries, but still apparent – decline in reading frequency and 'quality' on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, the population's continuous hunger for books, a hunger largely generated by a constantly undersupplied book market, or more precisely, by a market undersupplied with the kinds of books people actually wanted to read. Some reading surveys also revealed substantial heterogeneity and differentiation in individual reading habits, interests, and motivations. Despite the centralised production of 'correct' and 'harmless' printed matter, various texts with complex and potentially (to use Krupskaya's and her comrades' term) 'harmful' messages continued to leak past the centrally controlled system to reach readers, though in some periods and countries more intensely than in others, and there is no way one can compare, for example, Czech book production in the late 1960s with its production in the early 1950s, or Czech production in the 1970s with Hungarian or Polish book production in the same decade. Readers' tastes and preferences continued to vary, too, as a considerable percentage of the population either read nothing or could not appreciate the aesthetic and ideological 'quality' of the texts they were (institutionally) encouraged to read.

The trends towards growing social *differentiation* – at least at the level of what today would be called practices of cultural consumption, i.e. a level that according to Kamarás did not necessarily have to copy traditional socio-demographic characteristics – were in sharp contradiction to the declared ideals of social *homogenisation*, the attainment of which was anticipated with the establishment of a class-free society founded on the principles of social justice. From as far back as the 1960s, and increasingly so by the 1980s, it was becoming more and more obvious that planned and controlled 'equal' access to the printed

word (guaranteed by the centralised production of texts) failed to result in 'equal' participation in its reception. It could perhaps be said that it was research on books and reading that, while it was not necessarily waving an anti-Communist flag, made this point clear, perhaps both intentionally and unintentionally. It confirmed that actual reading practices considerably contradicted the original reader-centred theory and policy design. However, more importantly, references to failures in the area of cultural and intellectual production and reception, in classical Marxist theory defined as the 'unproductive superstructure', signalled a major failure of the system of central control as such.

PART II

MANUFACTURING COLD WAR BOOKS

*“This people loves books so much, that it is
impossible ever to see them disappear.”*

- A Catholic missionary in the Counter-Reformation
in Bohemia in the early 18th century¹

¹ Quoted in Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, “Reading unto Death: Books and Readers in Eighteenth-Century Bohemia,” in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 201.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AMBIGUITIES OF CENSORSHIP AND RESISTANCE

Recent studies of centrally controlled societies, and of their literary history in particular, have shown that much of the Cold War-era scholarship on culture in Eastern Europe, both inside and outside the region (i.e. Western studies of Eastern Europe or so-called Sovietology), was 'colonial' in the sense that the bodies of knowledge produced on either side of the divide were largely trapped in an extra-historical space dominated by pro- or anti-Soviet ideology.¹ In this context, a certain thematic dichotomy tended to dominate much of what was produced in the West as 'knowledge' about cultural issues in Eastern Europe, a dichotomy in which the issue of the 'censorship' practised by the communist regimes was positioned on one side and issues of textual production and reception in resistance to the totalitarian authorities, usually grouped under the conceptual umbrella of 'samizdat', were positioned on the other side. This thematic opposition, in which there is no apparent consensus on how even to define these basic terms, must not be viewed as a feature peculiar exclusively to the way in which themes relating to culture and print were constructed. In reality, this opposition was an integral part of the overall Cold War intellectual dynamics and discourse attached to the East–West division of the world and the associated explanatory frameworks that were touched on in the introduction to this book. The question of how narratives about centrally controlled books were produced, which is the subject of the discussion below, cannot be separated from the more general characteristics of discourse in a period when – with some exceptions – isolationist and myth-constructing tendencies dominated the political and intellectual contexts on both sides of the Cold War divide.

¹ E. Dobrenko, (1997), x. Michael Holquist refers to 'kremlinology' as a specific form of discourse in Western Sovietology, which tends to focus on the very peak of the Soviet political hierarchy, or possibly its opposition, while largely ignoring the actual socio-cultural dynamics of the wider population. See Michael Holquist, "Ten Theses on the Relevance of Cultural Criticism for Russian Studies (History, Myth, Biography)," in *New Formations. A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics. Postcommunism: Rethinking the Second World* 22 (Spring 1994).

Dichotomous discourses cannot be seen as just a product of the Cold War, for, as Robert Darnton noted, the difficulty involved in the history of censorship “is that it looks so simple: it pits the children of light against the children of darkness”.² This leading historian of ‘revolutions in print’ was himself drawn to making a brief comparative study of the year 1789 in France and the year 1989 in former East Germany in order to challenge the assumed dichotomy embedded in the very notion of ‘censorship’.³ While at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin as a visiting scholar just as the wall was collapsing, he took the opportunity to interview the administrative employees in charge of publishing and the book trade at the Ministry of Culture. Following the approach he applied in his analyses of book control in pre-revolutionary France, Darnton tried to reconstruct the institutional structure of the ‘bureaucratic administration’ of ‘pre-revolutionary’ East Germany and traced the various stages of a book’s journey from the author to the printer and finally to the reader. Perhaps not surprisingly, his interviewees did not see themselves as ‘oppressors’ of East German creative culture, nor did they believe that getting rid of ‘heretical books was their prime task; instead they told the American professor that the main purpose of their bureau was “to make literature happen – that is, to oversee the process by which ideas became books and books reached readers”.⁴

Darnton noted that these people were “eager to demonstrate that they were university people like myself, not faceless bureaucrats and certainly not Stalinists”.⁵ They assured him that, while their role was to help get books published and contribute to the advancement of East Germany’s *Leseland*, safely protected against the influx of Western

² Robert Darnton, “Censorship. A Comparative View: France 1789- East Germany 1989,” *Representations* 49, (Winter 1995), 40. Perhaps the most concise work on censorship to date is a large volume that includes entries on related issues referring to cases from a variety of historical periods and social contexts all over the world: *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, ed. Derek Jones (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001).

³ The deep impact of Darnton’s work on these subjects can be illustrated in the following story. During a discussion that followed my panel on transitional book cultures at the SHARP conference in London in 2002, an American book historian admitted that until he had read Darnton’s *Berlin Journal* he had not realised that it is possible for books to exist in a non-commercial environment. What this story also illustrates is the alarming lack of awareness within the community of book historians about issues related to book cultures outside the Western European and North American contexts.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

consumer culture by the Berlin Wall, book production and reception in Germany, they claimed, was determined by the plan of titles for publication and print runs and by the self-regulatory principles in every author's head. Darnton's subjects gave testimony of a system whose continuity they were instrumental in actively reproducing and facilitating. Moreover, their comments about 'protecting' their country from Western trash clearly show that they to some extent identified with the basic ideological assumptions of the dominant regime, in particular the idea that the community of (common) readers is actually in need of protection in the first place. At the very least they were as yet not ready, back in 1989, to take up any other position on this issue, and Darnton acknowledged that "a great deal of self-justification went into this self-description".⁶ He also expressed concerns about the "ideological purity and institutional health" manifested in official documents, including the book production plan as such, which he was given to study, and which showed no signs of the impending collapse of the system. Within the limited scope of a research article, Darnton was unable to more deeply explore the materials produced outside the institutional grip of "the control mechanism for literature in the GDR".⁷ However, he was able to challenge the testimony of his subjects at the level of reception by suggesting that "East Germans not only read between lines; they also controlled the meanings in the blank spaces. They read critically, aggressively, with a combination of sophistication and alienation unimaginable in the West, even among other hardest deconstructors".⁸ Nonetheless, an analysis of textual production at other levels, such as editorial work further down the production line in the individual publishing houses, and of the reception side of textual communication, for instance, the reception of 'travel' books between the Western and Eastern parts of Germany, could have provided a more complex picture of how regulated textual production operated within the everyday cultural experience of the population and would perhaps have revealed the widening gap between the image of consistency on the side of official discourse and the actual variety of discourses and practices that existed in the GDR's 'pre-revolutionary'

⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁷ Ibid., 48.

⁸ Ibid., 57–58.

book scene.⁹ Although the methodological choice of focusing on the ‘gatekeeper’s’ perspective may seem limited, it ultimately led Darnton to the conclusion that it is simply not “adequate to orient the history of censorship around the truism that censors share a common task of eliminating heresies”.¹⁰

There are, however, many examples where the schematic trio of the ‘almighty censor’, ‘oppressed author’, and ‘deprived reader’ becomes a methodological guideline and invites the kinds of binary oppositions of light and darkness that Darnton mentions and that may fail to explain the complexities of centrally controlled cultural experience. This trio has been especially prevalent in accounts of the cultural and literary dynamics of the most strictly controlled environments, such as the last two decades of Ceaușescu’s Romania, the “concentration camp of the mind”.¹¹ As in other totalitarian contexts, in the Romanian case the story of censorship is presented in two basic forms. The first form, as one Romanian poet put it, “was a state institution, with clerks who read the texts and decided what was acceptable to the Communist Party or what lay outside the party line”, with the latter involving the possible consequences of lost jobs, trials, and prison. The second was “self- or inner censorship ... a very insidious, shrewd way of violating people’s thoughts and reducing their freedom”.¹² In the specific circumstances of Romania, the term ‘post-censorship’ was used to define an author’s state of mind after having managed to get his/her work published, referring to “a variety of possible feelings, going from the satisfaction of having evaded the censor or having been able to express part of the truth ... to a sense of futility, shame, weariness”.¹³

⁹ On one significant aspect of German book culture during the Cold War, i.e. German East-West textual dynamics, see, for example, Mark Lehmstedt and Siegfried Lokatis, eds., *Das Loch in der Mauer. Der innerdeutsche Literaturaustausch*. Vorzugspreis für Mitglieder des Leipziger Arbeitskreises zur Geschichte des Buchwesens (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1997). For an edited volume on the history of a major East German publisher of translated literature *Volk und Welt* (1947–2001), see Siegfried Lokatis and Simone Barck, eds., *Fenster zur Welt. Eine Geschichte des DDR-Verlags Volk und Welt* (Berlin: C. Links 2003).

¹⁰ R. Darnton (1995), 58.

¹¹ Lidia Vianu, *Censorship in Romania* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), x. The book includes a set of interviews conducted with leading Romanian writers and intellectuals during 1991–1992, along with samples of their work.

¹² Ibid., 28, 29. From an interview with Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, poet, essayist, translator, and editor.

¹³ Ibid., 67. From an interview with Matei Călinescu, literary critic, academic, and novelist who exiled to the USA in 1973.

Paradoxically, this notion of censorship – whether performed at the institutional or individual levels – necessarily generates space for its own glorification or, more precisely, for the glorification of its social impact and cultural consequences. It is censorship that “usually eliminates the lazy, or those who are not gifted. Obstacles are made for those who know how to overcome them”. Consequently, the effort required to surmount these obstacles “cultivated unbelievable imagination in the people, ... it staged the most interesting experiment, created the most interesting literature in the world”.¹⁴ Essayist, translator, journalist and a distinguished member of the Romanian opposition, Monica Lovinescu provided an even more complex picture of local cultural dynamics by referring to the four features of the literary establishment following Ceaușescu’s famous ‘July Thesis’ of 1971, which essentially meant a comeback of the Stalinist period in the Party’s cultural management and practices. These four features were: sporadic courage; a position in the social order transformed into an aesthetic criterion; some forms of corruption; and a breakdown between generations, as some younger members of the opposition were ready to compromise the regime, while some older members insisted on resisting.¹⁵

Nonetheless, the old assumption that ‘good books’, whatever that phrase refers to, can only result from a certain kind of (politically) frustrating experience, rings loud and clear in some of these accounts. No matter how extreme or even somewhat exaggerated the testimony of Romanian intellectuals based on their own specific experience appears from today’s perspective, it is difficult to question them without deeper insight into the nature of Ceaușescu’s establishment.¹⁶ There are, however, also signs of binary explanatory frameworks firmly entrenched in the work of some experts on East European issues who lived and worked beyond the reach of any oppressive regime. Those in exile circles in particular tended to apply the discourse techniques referred to above in references to their communist former homelands. One example might be *Daydreams and Nightmares: Czech Communist and Ex-Communist Literature 1917–1987*, a study by

¹⁴ Ibid., 83. From an interview with Dumitru Radu Popescu, novelist and dramatist, former member of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party and an ex-president of the Writer’s Union.

¹⁵ Monica Lovinescu cited in András Bozóki, ed., *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1991), 59.

¹⁶ See, for example Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

Petr Hrubý, a political scientist who was part of the 1948 wave of Czechoslovak emigration based in Australia.¹⁷ The author's basic argument is that "the (Czech) nation was favourably prepared (for the Communist takeover in 1948) by its intelligentsia", whose members had been "carefully prepared" by Soviet propaganda and secret services. In his book, Hrubý writes that his objective is "to demonstrate such a hopeful but tragic path on the collective example of some thirty Czech writers who shared the tempting dream and therefore joined the Communist Party ...". In his conclusion he refers to these writers as people who adopted "the Marxist-Leninist myth of a renewal of humanity by a bloody revolution and terror", which included the "teaching of class hatred" combined with a "subconscious *need for hate, cruelty, sadism and masochism*".¹⁸ While the book tries to identify a certain continuity in, for instance, the leftwing tendencies of 20th-century Czech intellectuals (an issue that had yet to be addressed), and was therefore at the time of its release one of the few accounts of Czech cultural and intellectual history of its kind available to an international audience, the few lines quoted above are enough to reveal the main principles of the discourse on which the author based his text. For Hrubý, the relationship of Czech intellectuals to the central authority is the main if not the only driving force behind literary, cultural, historical, and indeed even political developments, and it becomes the key criterion in his evaluation and study of individual texts and their authors. When the Czech edition of the book came out in the early 2000s, judging from the reaction in the press, which was not just random but largely negative, the Czech community of critics was not prepared simply to applaud discourse inspired by straightforward political positions and tastes.¹⁹

¹⁷ Peter Hrubý, *Daydreams and Nightmares. Czech Communist and Ex-Communist Literature 1917–1987*. East European Monographs, No. CCXC (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). The book was published ten years later in Czech translation: Petr Hrubý, *Osudné iluze. Čeští spisovatelé a komunismus 1917–1987*, [Fatal Illusions. Czech Writers and Communism 1917–1987], (Rychnov nad Kněžnou: Ježek, 2000). While the book came out originally back in 1990, it is realistic to assume that much of the research would have been conducted and its approaches developed prior to 1989. It is also worth noting that the original English edition of Hrubý's book was published by the prestigious Columbia University Press, but the Czech edition in 2000 was released by a small publisher in Eastern Bohemia.

¹⁸ P. Hrubý (1990), 3, 1, 307.

¹⁹ The few critical reactions that did appear mostly highlighted the one-dimensional perspective of the author's account. One critic, Jiří Rulf, writing for the prominent Czech cultural and social weekly periodical *Reflex*, noted that instead of blaming the

A binary scheme of oppression and resistance is found repeatedly in studies driven by the clear political agenda largely defined by Cold War discourse, and it also survived the fall of the Iron Curtain and has continued to surface in texts whose primary focus is not necessarily related to the Cold War era. Derek Sayer's Shakespearianly titled *The Coasts of Bohemia* is an extensive study of Czech 20th-century history that was published in English in the first decade after 1989, and it, too, raises a number of questions, particularly in those parts of the book devoted to censorship. A figure that largely dominates Sayer's narration of book control is the Jesuit missionary Antonín Koniáš (1691–1760). Sayer is by no means the only author to have developed a fascination with this figure, as Koniáš's reputation as an obsessive 'heretic' book-burner during the peak period of re-Catholisation of the local Protestant population has made him virtually the embodiment of Bohemian censorship for centuries.²⁰ Sayer refers to Koniáš as a historical figure, but he

pre-war Czech intellectuals for their 'faithful illusions' (the title of the book in Czech) and referring to their original political orientations, of greater importance would be an examination of the individual 'moral resistance' of each of them to the centralisation and silencing of the local cultural scene dating back to 1945, and to follow their – usually very complicated – journeys through the decades that followed 1948. Jaromír Hořec, a poet, journalist and literary scholar, who was expelled from Charles University after 1969 and jailed in the 1980s for his samizdat activities, published a sharply critical review of the book in a left-oriented daily *Právo*, a successor of the former main communist newspaper *Rudé Právo*. While he appreciated the challenges and impulses the book certainly offers, he pointed out a number of factual inaccuracies in Hrubý's book and attacked his tendency to simplify and reduce the position and significance of key Czech poets and writers in Czech literary history to merely their relationship to communism. Conversely, Ota Ulč, an exiled political scientist and a fiction writer himself, hailed the book on his web site as a "document of intellectual weakness, hypocrisy, and betrayal that was destroying characters as well as talents". See Jiří Rulf, "Prometheova játra," [Prometheus' Liver], *Reflex* 12/12 (22 March 2001), 68–70; Jaromír Hořec, "Do diskuse o literárním včerejšku," [A Discussion on the Literary Past], *Právo* 11/150 (28 June 2001), 11; Ota Ulč, "O dřívějším a nyníjším počínání inženýrů duší," [On the Past and Present Activities of the Engineers of Human Souls], <http://www.otaulc.com/text/730.htm> (July 2001), (accessed 29 September 2006).

²⁰ Koniáš left a large footprint in local history – and not just book-related history – mainly owing to his famous Index *Clavis hearesim claudens et aperiens* (A Key for Recognising and Opening Heresies) which was a list of nearly all titles published in the Czech language between 1436 and 1620, including Czech exile production and the Hussite, Calvinist, Lutheran and Czech Brethren's texts. The "Key" was published in Hradec Králove, 1729, the 2nd edition, revised and annotated in 1749, and the 3rd edition in 1770. Though estimates of the number of books Koniáš managed to destroy in the course of his thirty-year career exist, some resources cite a figure of thirty or sixty thousand, while others up to about 300,000 volumes. It is a paradox of local book history that Koniáš was the son of a well-established Prague printer and therefore was intimately familiar with operations in the world of printed matter. What is usually less emphasised are his other public activities, such as organising Jesuit missions, his

also uses him as a discourse-generated construct, a metaphoric figure symbolising totalitarian control over books, whether that means control exercised through the instructions issued by the state in 1953 for screening book collections in libraries, or the seventeen drawers of index cards that make up the catalogue of ‘forbidden literature’ set up in the early 1970s and housed in the National Library in Clementinum in Prague. This construction of censorship is yet more evidence of the “trouble with its history” identified by Darnton, for it seems largely to be based on a conceptual dichotomy of oppression versus resistance, a key attribute assigned to the Czech reading community throughout its modern history, whether this concerns the period of Habsburg, Nazi, or Communist rule.

Sayer discusses a random selection of items listed in the 1970s catalogue, such as the thirty-seven-page list of titles by and about T. G. Masaryk and his family members, *The International Who's Who and Books in Print*, transcripts from the Stalinist show trials in the 1950s, works by exiled and samizdat authors, books on Czech and world history, mostly produced prior to 1968, but also some 1960s editions of the history of the local Communist Party, editions of Karel Čapek's texts with introductions written by activists of the Prague Spring, and even Engels's *On Religion*.²¹ The list of *libri prohibiti*, no matter how outrageous and ridiculous its content, cannot in itself fully cover the entire issue of post-1968 ‘censorship’. At the very least it is important to note that the post-Prague Spring removal of books from public libraries took place in three phases between 1972 and 1976 and

involvement with Catholic publishing, and his own prolific work as a writer, primarily driven by an interest in what we would today call today the ‘common reader’. As Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux put it in reference to the book-struggles during Koniáš's time, “since there was little hope of curing the common people of its habit of reading, its books would be replaced by others”. For the Jesuit missionaries, “conversion was unthinkable without substituting safe books for dangerous ones”. See M.-E. Ducreux, (1989), 201. For a brief account of Koniáš's impact on Czech book history in the 18th century, see, for example, M. Bohatcová (1990), 273–277.

²¹ After 1989, both lists were also published in three special issues of *Čtenář* [Reader] 42/ 2, 3, 4 (1990), 1–6; 9–16; 17–22. There were actually two major lists of books to be removed from libraries that were issued in the early 1950s; books from the first list were to be deposited in the Institute for the History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and those from the second list were located in specially designated libraries. Some of these books were returned to libraries in 1968, but many of them were taken out of circulation again in the early 1970s. The list in the 1970s included thousands of titles divided into two categories – the most dangerous printed matter, defined as “subversive of the socialist state” (located in depositories of the State Library) and those with “improper content” (located in the district state research libraries).

the selection of books removed was based on the first list of banned books that was drawn up on the basis of the instructions for 'special collections; issued by the Ministry of Culture (Act No. 9695/72 of 31 May 1972).²² The first phase focused primarily on books published in the country in 1968–1969, books whose authors were part of the so-called obrodný proces (revival process) of the 1960s or were advocates of loosely defined 'rightwing forces' and members of the post-August exile.²³ According to a special report on the achievements of the book-purging process, which was issued on 5 January 1976, nearly one million volumes, i.e. two percent of the entire book stock available in the country's public and specialised libraries, was removed in order to "clear the shelves for new, Party-oriented and politically correct literature". However, this entire process was about anything but fully addressing the issue of banned books.²⁴

Archival sources show that the instructions issued by the authorities that supervised libraries and publishing houses kept changing over time, not all of them existed in written form, and very little consensus actually existed on how to define a 'dangerous' book.²⁵ In addition, though this is rather difficult to prove, librarians applied a variety of techniques of 'passive resistance' in order to complicate the book-purging process. Thousands of books were excluded 'by mistake' in order to retain others for readers (e.g. Jack London would be removed from the shelves instead of Arthur London), and the individual phases of the purging process were intentionally delayed. Some books were 'accidentally lost' altogether instead of being deposited in the

²² Eva Skaláková, "‘Libri Prohibiti’ 70. let ve fondu Knihovny Akademie věd České republiky," [‘Libri Prohibiti’ of the 1970s in the Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic], *Informace 2* (Prague: Knihovna AV ČR, 2003), 7–55.

²³ Ibid., 25.

²⁴ Ibid., 29.

²⁵ These included the Archive of the Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic used by Skaláková, as well as the archives of some of the individual state-operated publishers held in the Národní archiv (National archive – NA) as well as the archives of Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví (LAPNP – Literary Archive of the Museum of Czech Literature), located in Staré Hradky castle; this archive was consulted for the purpose of this study. For information on the National Archives (i.e. an office of the state administration and the central state archives, controlled by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic), see <http://www.nacr.cz/>. Internal materials, further information on the publisher's files, and access to unprocessed files was kindly provided by the archivist at of the National Archives, Jan Kahuda in July–August 2008.

‘specialised collections’ and it can be assumed that they ended up in private libraries.²⁶

Like the lists of *libri prohibiti* – regardless of how inane they were – the actual reception of ‘heretical’ works by real audiences in everyday situations is a question that must also be considered in any story of censorship. The wealth of stories, anecdotes, and even clichés and stereotypes about the catalogues of banned books and even about well-known Czech literati like Bohumil Hrabal and Jaroslav Seifert (whose places in the Czech publishing scene of the 1970s and 1980s will be briefly addressed below) are still not enough to provide an adequate idea of the complexity of the ever-changing and unstable position of individual texts in the specific context of book production and reception during this period. While Sayer’s book provides an informative and extensive account of the country’s cultural and intellectual history, frequent references to one omnipresent subject, the Communist Party, whose “attempts to massage the national memory” was an “ongoing, authentically Orwellian process”,²⁷ are just one manifestation of the discursively seductive tendency to reproduce the clash between the “children of light and darkness”.

There is one other powerful tool of discourse that is frequently used to construct censorship narratives: the use of irony, sarcasm, and a certain kind of folkish joviality – the main purpose of which is apparently to make this otherwise ‘tragic’ and ‘dramatic’ issue more accessible to wider audiences. One such example is Dušan Tomášek’s revealingly titled *Attention – Censored! Or, from the Life of Comradess Censorship*.²⁸ This book provides a brief and valuable summary of the main events leading up to the establishment of the key local institution for controlling printed matter, the Hlavní správa tiskového dohledu (HSTD – Central Administration for Supervision of the Press), and its subsequent operations, while quoting substantially from the unique archival

²⁶ Ibid., 28–33. It is hard to resist making a personal note at this point and not mention the countless ‘banned’ books lent to me by friends or fellow students in the 1980s, in which the stamp of some small regional public library could be found on the inside cover page.

²⁷ D. Seyer (1998), 261.

²⁸ Dušan Tomášek, *Pozor, cenzurováno! aneb ze života soudružky cenzury*, [Attention, Censored! Or, from the Life of Comradess Censorship], (Prague: Vyd. a nakl. MV ČR, 1994). The humorous nature of the title can perhaps be further underscored by the fact that in Czech the noun ‘*cenzura*’ is grammatically feminine, and a ‘she-comrade’ could generate even more sarcastic meanings than a male counterpart.

sources of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.²⁹ Some of the statements quoted from the reports that were made by the board's members, who were very careful never to use the word 'censor', provoke bitter laughter, even without Tomášek's attempts at humorous commentary and creating inventive categories, such as *lžikoniáši* (lie-Koniášes).³⁰

Humour and irony, as Ivor Armstrong Richards reminds us, are especially effective tools with which to address matters that might otherwise be too personal or too persistent and allow us to avoid disaster in doing so. Parody, he notes, "easily overthrows tragedy", while "the ironic addition paralyses it; even a mediocre joke may make it look lopsided and extravagant".³¹ No matter how much this ironic and parodic narration is driven by an attempt to underline the socially pathological nature of 'censorship' and to help the purportedly uninformed reader to understand this pathology, the author's comments seem to be infected by the very tools of discourse employed by the object of his study – the 'censor' himself. At the same time, censorship could also be narrated from a liberating discursive distance. In an interview in *The Economist* shortly after 1989, Miroslav Holub stated in a kind of discourse liberated by distance that, "the censor was not a great obstacle ... these were dull people [and] the less dull ones did not remain censors for long – they got smart by reading, and reading, and had to be dismissed".³² Holub's own ironic definition of censorship

²⁹ Tomášek, along with colleagues at the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences, has been working on another collection of documents and annotations, which represents one of the few scholarly accounts of this topics published in the country after 1989. See Karel Kaplan and Dušan Tomášek, *O cenzuře v Československu v letech 1945–1956*, [On Censorship in Czechoslovakia 1945–1956], *Sešity ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AVČR*, Vol. 22 (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994).

³⁰ To take just one example of the author's narrative techniques, he quotes a censor's complaint about the lack of clarity in a text he was to censor, and which he fears could potentially invite an 'undesirable' interpretation, and to this Tomášek adds the following comments: "Yet another deadly heresy, to leave it up to the reader to think independently. It was not up to the reader to think, since his elected and chosen representatives were thinking on his behalf and in the only correct direction!" This way Tomášek thus over-interprets even messages that are not explicitly present in the censor's texts. Through this process of, shall we say, semantic exaggeration the author offers additional and mostly redundant explanations, and consequently his comments have the effect of obscuring the very nature of the control system by parodying it as a kind of Švejkian tale. Quoted from D. Tomášek, (1994), 83.

³¹ Ivor Armstrong Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 112, 194.

³² "Death Has No Adjective," an interview with Miroslav Holub, *The Economist* 315/7657 (2 June 1990), 125–126. Miroslav Holub (1932–1998) was an immunologist

may have been the result of considerable poetic license on his part, and may have been influenced by his personal experience with the 'normalisation' regime. Nevertheless, the use of ironic and parodic narrative strategies to construct the story of censorship actually seems to defuse its certainly explosive and dramatic nature, and, as Richards would put it, this effect can emerge in the process of perceiving such texts. While it underlines the demonic nature of censorship, it simultaneously overshadows how multifaceted it was. Assuming that the way in which a given society constructs stories of the past has a direct impact on how it perceives its present, the narratives of 'communist censorship' outlined above necessarily must have an impact on current narratives and indeed perceptions.

However, the question remains of how to define 'censorship', as the very definition is indicative of the source of its origin, intensity, and impact in a particular socio-cultural environment. Much literature has recently been produced on this topic, and it will be further addressed in the following chapters.³³ At this point it is enough to note that the notion of censorship cannot simply be reduced to lists of *libri prohibiti* or to the story about how the designated office of book regulation and control was established. In his extensive study of political and cultural dynamics in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1947, a key period, when the centrally controlled system that would be installed after 1948 was being designed and its regulatory mechanisms tested, Pavel Janáček uses a definition of censorship that I have tried to elaborate on in my previous work, where I proposed examining the issue of censorship as "complex of barriers created by a web of literary institutions that have

with an international reputation, an essayist and poet of "intellectually and morally probing, superficially unlyrical poems, often mini-narratives" which "exploit the vocabulary, idiom and imagery of biology and other sciences ... not devoid of irony and humor", as a translator of some of his work into English, James Naughton, put it. J. Naughton (1995), 120–121. Since 1970 Holub was banned from the access to official publishing and was only allowed to publish poetry in state houses by 1982 following his public denunciation. He continued to publish his scientific work in professional outlets, and to contribute occasionally to samizdat edited volumes, while his literary work was being published in translations abroad. See "Miroslav Holub" in <http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/showContent.jsp?docId=1023&hl=miroslav+holub+> (accessed 1 February 2009).

³³ Perhaps the most concise work on censorship to date is a thick volume that includes entries on related issues referring to cases from a variety of historical periods and social contexts all over the world: *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, edited by Derek Jones (London: Fitzroy Dearborn 2001).

shaped the space between the reader and the written word”.³⁴ While notions of the printed text and the book clearly go well beyond the any one set of ‘literary’ works and institutions, the regulation and constraints affecting the production of fiction and poetry have traditionally attracted more scholarly attention than, for example, the regulation of any kind of non-fiction text. It must be acknowledged that ‘literature’ (fiction, non-fiction, poetry) and the ‘book’ tend to be overlapping concepts, or rather, ‘literature’ has a tendency to colonise the concept of the ‘book’. Given the nature of the available resources these overlaps perhaps cannot be entirely avoided.

While the very notion of censorship tends to evoke an opposition of ‘light’ and ‘darkness’, in the specific case of narratives about cultural life under the communist governments it tends to be accompanied by a counter-construct that is centred on notions of resistance and opposition and often summarised under the term ‘samizdat’.³⁵ From a wider historical perspective, samizdat could even be regarded as a kind of pirate book production, because, as Altick convincingly demonstrated using the example of the British book market in the 1770s, the prosperity of any ‘alternative’ textual production has always resulted from the fact that the supply of books produced by ‘regular’ means failed to meet the demand.³⁶

As with many other terms used in analyses of the Cold War era, the usage of this term has been semantically unstable, but it has had a tendency to subsume most textual production defined as alternative to state-supported and thus censored books, without respecting the profound differences in the social and cultural dynamics of the individual countries encompassed within the Soviet satellite bloc. Both local and international observers and scholars have pointed out that ‘samizdat’, originally a Russian term, is not particularly appropriate for understanding Czech alternative textual production. The poet and cultural

³⁴ Jiřina Šmejkalová, “Censoring Canons: Transitions and Prospects of Literary Institutions in Czechoslovakia,” in Richard Burt, ed., *The Administration of the Aesthetic: Censorship, Political Criticism and the Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1994), 210, 211. Cited in Pavel Janáček, *Literární brak: operace vyloučení, operace nahrazení, 1938–1951*, [Literary Trash: Operation of Exclusion, Operation of Replacement], (Brno: Host, 2004), 43.

³⁵ For one of the richest and most representative accounts of Eastern European alternative production, see the exhibition catalogue *Samizdat: alternative Kultur in Zentral- und Osteuropa: die 60er bis 80er Jahre* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2000).

³⁶ R. Altick (1967).

activist Jiří Gruša, who spent the 1980s in exile in Germany, noted that “Russian samizdat is historically a Russian phenomenon, whereas in societies outside the Soviet Union it operates as the only continuum of a thin and suppressed historicity”.³⁷ In her introduction to a collection of essays by Czech dissident authors, aptly titled *Good-bye, Samizdat*, the Canada-based scholar Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz noted that the majority of the available terms imposed on “this extraordinary phenomenon of the twentieth century, when, half a millennium after Gutenberg, homemade books ... became the medium” seem entirely inadequate. The term “illegal ... would conflict with the law-abiding status attitude of its authors”, the word “inedit ... is likely to confuse more than clarify”. The term “unofficial literature” does not seem specific enough, as even past societies (and here she quotes the Czech linguist Karel Palek, who was also published in samizdat under the pseudonym Petr Fidelius) “have always harboured some unofficial forms of culture”. She accepts the concept of samizdat as the only one “relatively free of misleading connotations” because “it expresses the necessity of doing yourself what ought to be done by an appropriate institution”.³⁸

The history of samizdat in former Czechoslovakia is well documented and was widely discussed both before and after 1989, perhaps more so than censorship itself.³⁹ Although the emergence of these

³⁷ Jiří Gruša, *Cenzura a literární život mimo masmédiá*, [Censorship and Literary Life outside the Media], (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1992), 14. Published in co-operation with ČSDS Scheinfeld. Originally released in 1982.

³⁸ Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, ed., *Good-bye, Samizdat. Twenty Years of Czechoslovak Underground Writing* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), xvii.

³⁹ For a pre-1989 discussion of related topics, see Gordon H. Skilling, “Samizdat: A Return to the pre-Gutenberg Era?” in *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture*, edited by Ladislav Matějka and Benajmin Stolz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), 64–80. For a selected collection of samizdat texts, see M. Goetz-Stankiewicz ed. (1992). For an overview of banned authors, see Jiří Brabec et al., *Slovník zakázaných autorů*, [A Dictionary of Banned Authors], (Prague: SPN, 1991); for a bibliography of banned translators, see Zdeňka Rachůnková, *Zamlčování překladatelé: bibliografie 1948–1989*, [Silenced Translators: A Bibliography 1948–1989], (Prague: Ivo Železný, 1992). For an account of samizdat in the wider context of the region, see Gordon H. Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989). For a study of alternative cultures from a perspective of a sociologist, see Josef Alan, *Alternativní kultura: příběh české společnosti 1945–1989*, [Alternative Culture: The Story of Czech Society 1945–1989], (Prague: Lidové noviny, 2001). In addition to the locally produced bibliographies, see also the bibliography of the British Library *Czech and Slovak Samizdat: A Catalogue of British Library Holdings*, compiled by Peter Hellyer and Devana Pavlik (London: British Library: Slavonic and East European Collections, 2003).

independent publishing activities can be traced back to the 1950s, it seems to be generally accepted that in the Czech, and to some extent Slovak, context, samizdat mainly flourished in response to 'normalisation' in the 1970s and 1980s and continued right up until 17 November 1989. Ivo Bock noted that compared to other countries in the Eastern bloc (Hungary and Poland) more Czech writers were excluded from the 'official' sphere and were forced to move into the alternative spheres; Charter 77 documents referred to between 350 and 400 authors. The official sphere's overriding strategy was to try to stifle the existence of alternative textual production and avoid confronting it directly, while equally samizdat authors rarely reflected on official textual production. In terms of quantity the Polish produced the most work in East European samizdat, but the Czechs produced far more fiction titles in samizdat than any other country in the region.⁴⁰

The larger volume of production was clearly connected with the specific social and political context of post-1968 Czechoslovakia. The dramatic images of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the biggest operation ever undertaken in the history of the Warsaw Pact,⁴¹ were shown by the media around the world and were certainly very alarming and moving. But the interventions into every sphere of the country's social, intellectual, and cultural life that occurred in the subsequent twenty-year project known as 'normalisation', were far more powerful. The paradoxical and chilling euphemism applied to this two-decade period was intended to convey the idea of 'returning things to normal' in the aftermath of the social and political 'pathologies' of the 1960s. The normalisation period was a key point in the country's modern history, but data, analyses, and even analysts vary in what they say its real social and cultural consequences were. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet occupation, a million and a half Party members were vetted and 320 000 were expelled, followed by more expulsions later. Many of these people worked in the spheres of culture, the media, academia, or public services. Approximately 140 000 people had already left the country by the end of 1969. The number of people dismissed from their jobs is estimated to have been 750 000, and around

⁴⁰ Ivo Bock, "Jedna česká literatura? K některým tendencím 'oficiální', samizdatové a exilové prózy 1969–1989," [One Literature? Some Tendencies in 'Official,' Samizdat and Exile Prose 1969–1989], *Česká literatura* 40/1 (1992), 67.

⁴¹ J. Vykoukal et al. cite approximately half a million Soviet, Hungarian, Bulgarian and GDR soldiers being involved in this operation, and 800 military planes, 6300 tanks, altogether 27 divisions. J. Vykoukal et al. (2000), 387.

two million people may have been indirectly affected.⁴² Institutions connected with writing and books saw 400 of their employees dismissed and 150 fiction writers and translators were expelled from professional organisations.⁴³ The loss of affiliation with the Writers' Union or Translators' Union *de facto* meant the loss of professional status and limited access to official publishing. People in such a position would have seen their manuscripts and publishing contracts deleted from the schedules of publishing houses and even books they had already published withdrawn from distribution and libraries. During the early 1970s, twenty-five literary journals were shut down and over 80% of publishing-house editors and executives and half of all the members of the professional association of journalists were fired.⁴⁴

It may never be possible to determine all the exact figures and reconstruct all the individual stories, but the rough estimates speak loudly enough, especially in relation to a total Czechoslovak population of around 15 million people. The first post-1968 wave of emigrants into exile contained numerous university-educated elites who had been involved in the liberalisation processes of the 1960s. They took with them their social and cultural capital, their education, experience, and skills, and their drive, energy, and enthusiasm, and, perhaps most importantly, with them also went public faith in and any vision of change. Family members who were left behind were exposed to various forms of harassment, including losing their jobs or seeing their careers blocked, just for having a relative abroad.⁴⁵ It is also important to note that the waves of emigration into exile were not limited to the 1970s but continued almost right up to 1989. From the sheer

⁴² J. Vykoukal et al. (2000), 575, 576.

⁴³ For a discussion of the persecution of professionals in the writing and book sector, see J. Gruša (1992); for the estimated number of dismissed authors, see Hans Renner, *A History of Czechoslovakia since 1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 101.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 101. Renner also noted that one of the reasons why the actual data on banned volumes may never be reconstructed is the lack of information from the provinces.

⁴⁵ What is perhaps less discussed in the available accounts of this period is the fact that people in exile left behind circles of close friends, who may not have suffered the same harassment as close family members did, but who had to continually question and justify their own decision to stay and suffered a great social and emotional loss that reduced their motivation for active involvement in public affairs. A person need not have been in the ranks of Milan Kundera or Miloš Forman to leave behind a social and emotional vacuum, which those who remained may never have been able to refill.

perspective of the country's economic and cultural development, the posts vacated by exiled or expelled professionals were soon restocked, but in most cases the newcomers were younger and less qualified and experienced than their predecessors. The significant setback Czechoslovakia experienced in the 1970s and 1980s, compared to development in Western Europe in almost any sphere of intellectual, social, and economic life during that period, can at least partly be attributed to this massive loss of human resources, which took decades, and indeed an entire generation, to replace.⁴⁶

Under these circumstances, a common way of sharing ideas and texts was by circulating manuscripts, or more precisely, circulating a limited number of typewritten copies of a manuscript, within circles of friends and committed fellow samizdat activists. It also represented an outlet for authors who – to quote one of them – “were unable to establish a reputation owing to the very fact that they were forbidden”.⁴⁷ It was not just top ‘dissidents,’ later canonised as the most active producers of alternative publishing projects, who engaged in this manner of textual communication. Samizdat publishing projects such as Edice Petlice (Padlock), run by the journalist and fiction writer Ludvík Vaculík (391 titles), Edice Expedice (Expedition), run by Václav Havel, his wife Olga, and his brother Ivan (277 titles), and Václav Kadlec’s Pražská imaginace (Prague Imagination, 126 titles) were very important, but they were just the tip of the iceberg, and the sphere of alternative textual production was much larger. The local samizdat scene, which was especially productive in the 1980s, also produced dozens of journals, such as *Vokno* (Window), *Kritický sborník* (Anthology of Criticism), *Informace o Chartě* (Information on the Charter), and *Revolver Revue*. Some sense of the overall amount of production can be obtained from the fact that, for example, the bibliography of all samizdat titles produced during the 1970s and 1980s includes 2083 items, the bibliography of Czech samizdat periodicals

⁴⁶ See Milan Otáhal, *Normalizace 1969–1989: příspěvek ke stavu bádání*, [Normalisation 1969–1989: a Contribution to the Current State of Research], (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd ČR, 2002), 55.

⁴⁷ Jiří Kratochvíl, “Integrace ‘oficiální’ literatury do celku literatury,” [The Integration of ‘Official’ Literature into Literature as a Whole], in *Česká nezávislá literatura po pěti letech v referátech (sborník referátů, diskusních příspěvků a tiskových ohlasů)*, [Czech Independent Literature Five Years Later - Conference Proceedings and Media Coverage]; presented at a conference in Prague on 17 November 1994–18 November 1994, edited by František Kautman (Prague: Primus, 1995), 45.

lists 150 titles, and the bibliography of professional texts in the field of history and historiography alone issued in samizdat contains 1649 titles.⁴⁸ Consequently, the very concept of samizdat has attracted a variety of explanatory perspectives, including discussions of its historical and social functions.

Two competing discourses have evolved around the representation of samizdat before and after 1989. On the one hand, there is a tendency to praise its role as “a testimony to independent thinking and creativity”, as Vilém Prečan, a former exiled historian and a key figure behind the Czechoslovak Documentation Centre of Independent Literature in Scheinfeld (est. 1986), puts it, and that tendency was chiefly evident in the testimonies of those who devoted much of their professional and personal lives to its support.⁴⁹ In their view, samizdat facilitated “the continuity of our literary tradition” and brought together different authors, united by the threat to their lives and “openly proclaimed hatred against the totalitarian power”, while substantially contributing to the collapse of the regime.⁵⁰ For its activists, samizdat represented an alternative and even oppositional form of textual production, which played a key role in sustaining the country’s cultural and political development during the last two decades of communist rule. However, doubts about the role of the entire oppositional community were already being raised during this period. In his comments on the samizdat edition of Ludvík Vaculík’s *Český snář* (The Czech Dream-Book), lawyer and politician Pavel Rychetský noted: “what we live in is often being called ‘parallel structures’ (how pretentious!), but it’s more a kind of ghetto, mostly self-made, which suffers from lack of external interest and of communication with the outside world ... the freedom we choose after 1969 made us gradually unfree.”⁵¹ In the view of some

⁴⁸ See Jitka Hanáková, *Edice českého samizdatu 1972–1991*, [Editions of Czech Samizdat, 1972–1991], (Prague: Státní knihovna ČR, 1997); Johanna Posset, *Česká samizdatová periodika 1968–1989*, [Czech Samizdat Periodicals 1968–1989], (Brno: Reprografia Brno, 1991); Jan Vlk et al., eds., *Minulost a dějiny v českém a slovenském samizdatu 1970 – 1989*, [The Past and History in Czech and Slovak Samizdat 1970–1989], (Brno: Doplněk, 1993).

⁴⁹ Vilém Prečan in *Česká nezávislá literatura ...* (1995), 87.

⁵⁰ František Kautman in *Česká nezávislá literatura....* (1995), 24, 25.

⁵¹ *Český snář* [A Czech Dreambook], an autobiographical novel written in combined form of a diary notes, memoirs, and short essays was first published by Petlice (1981), later on by the Toronto-based Sixty-Eight Publishers (1983), and its first post-’89 edition came out in Brno (Atlantis, 1990). In the book, Vaculík monitors a year of his personal life as well as the dissident community of the late 1970s, and his references to individual activists provoked controversial reactions. Pavel Rychetský’s

literary scholars reflecting on samizdat from a distance of five years after 1989, “independent literature ... was dependent particularly on its independency” (Jan Lukeš), and it was “still rooted in the 1960s in terms of its prevailing poetics and concerns”, thus acting as a kind of break on “natural literary development” after November 1989 (Vladimír Novotný).⁵²

The question of the actual social impact of samizdat and of the active support for it continues to be a matter of debate. For Ludvík Vaculík, the main figure behind Edice Petlice, the mission of his project was to “break through the wall of silence”; it was “intended as a means of helping preserve manuscripts: by protecting them and propagating them”. It would serve as a “source for future study of our epoch” and helped motivate authors, while bringing the literary activities going on in the country to the attention of Czech and foreign publishers abroad. Thus, rather than as a direct act of resistance, Vaculík defined his editions as a special kind of project aimed at conserving and documenting domestic culture.⁵³ Some scholars and activists distinguished a distinctive category, ‘underground’, which was a sphere distinct from either the ‘official’ scene or its ‘opposition.’⁵⁴ As one of the members of the underground noted, “... we were not enemies of the state – we just

letter cited from Ludvík Vaculík, *Hlasy nad rukopisem Vaculíkova Českého snáře*, [Voices on the Manuscript of Vaculík's Czech Dream-Book], (Prague: Torst, 1991), 36.

⁵² *Česká nezávislá literatura...*(1995), 193, 5.

⁵³ He used to send ‘his’ authors New Year’s cards expressing his wish that the upcoming year would provide them with “the key to the padlock” on the doors of the official publishing houses, which only started to be unlocked by late 1970s and then more so in the 1980s, for at least some authors, with Seifert, Hrabal and Holub being among the most visible cases. Ludvík Vaculík, “A Padlock for Castle Schwarzenberg”, in M. Goetz-Stankiewicz (1992), 123, 125; originally written in 1987. Castle Schwarzenberg in Scheinefeld, Germany, was the location of the Dokumentační středisko nezávislé literatury [Documentation Centre for the Promotion of Independent Czechoslovak Literature] established and directed by Vilém Prečan since 1986. The centre represented the main collection of samizdat texts and periodicals, documented them and distributed them to international libraries and researchers, and (illegally) supplied the domestic intellectual community with materials produced abroad. Among the main reasons for delays in setting up such institution was the lack of financial resources and the lack of consensus within the exiled circles.

⁵⁴ See Martin Machovec, “Šestnáct autorů českého literárního podzemí (1948–1989),” [Sixteen Authors from the Czech Literary Underground], in *Literární archiv: Sborník památníku národního písemnictví v Praze*, Vol. 25, (Prague: PNP, 1991); Ivan M. Jirous, “O české undergroundové literatuře 70. a 80. let,” [On Czech Underground Literature in the 1970s and the 1980s], in *Iniciály: Sešity nezavedené literatury 1/8–9* (August–September 1990).

did not get involved with the establishment, we lived in a slightly different way".⁵⁵ Ivo Bock has pointed out that the Czech underground was a specific cultural phenomenon with no comparative equivalent in any other country of the Soviet satellite bloc.⁵⁶ Martin Machovec, a literary scholar, editor, and translator, who was also involved in the production and distribution of samizdat volumes during the 1980s, defines underground by its "disinterest in any greater or larger publicity, in the public reaction to one's work, in integrating one's work in the literary and historical context of a particular period, a disinterest derived primarily from a principle resistance to all axiological and ideological parameters of our world".⁵⁷ In other words, the producers of texts and members of the underground bore no particular mission to 'preserve' or 'protect'. They would have located themselves outside the mainstream and on the margins of society and society's cultural production regardless of the regime in power.

Martin Pilař is the author of a major monograph on the underground published in Czech after 1989, in which he elaborated on the features of underground texts originally identified by Johanna Posset.⁵⁸ In his definition of the underground he refers to a combination of several issues, such as the rejection of any contact with the establishment, the rejection of any group programme or project, and an emphasis on authenticity in life, characterised by the absence of any collective identity. Members of the underground used a special language, mostly slang and colloquialisms, and rejected established social – though not ethical – norms. Although members of the underground were united in their stance of negating mainstream society, they were also dependent on it in the sense that, by refusing to take any regular or paid work, they lived off the leftovers of the mainstream.⁵⁹ In his study, Pilař also expanded the notion of underground to apply beyond the 1970s and 1980s and identified connections to the identified 'undergrounds' in other generations that demonstrated similar features in the 1950s and

⁵⁵ A review of Pavel Zedníček's *Zápisky z podzemí 1973–80*, [Notes from the Underground], (Prague: Torst, 2003), in *Lidové noviny* (23 January 2003), 19.

⁵⁶ I. Bock (1992), 81.

⁵⁷ Martin Machovec, "Vydávání undergroundové literatury v posledních letech a její ohlas," [Recent Publishing of Underground Literature and Its Reception], in *Česká nezávislá literatura po pěti letech v referátech* (1995), 161.

⁵⁸ Martin Pilař, *Underground: Kapitoly o českém literárním undergroundu*, [Underground: Chapters on the Czech Literary Underground], (Brno: Host, 1999), 25–31, in reference to Johanna Posset, *Česká samizdatová periodika...* (1991), 12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

even among those who continued to associate themselves with the position of outsider in the 1990s.⁶⁰

One figure that has contributed substantially to the discussion of the role of samizdat and alternative culture in more general terms is Václav Havel. In his key text on the socio-cultural dynamics of the 1970s and 1980s titled *Six Asides about Culture*, published in 1984, he noted that “the state of culture in (post-’68) Czechoslovakia was described, rather poignantly as a ‘Biafra of the spirit’” and many, including Havel himself, used the metaphor of a ‘graveyard’ to refer to the country’s ‘normalised’ culture.⁶¹ While he admitted that this metaphor may have applied to state cultural policy, the “real spiritual potential of our community” should be viewed differently. Despite his active involvement in the dissident movement and its publishing work, and despite his first-hand experience of how ruthless the regime could be, Havel tried to challenge the simplified view of cultural development under ‘normalisation’. He pointed out that more so than the numerous samizdat projects, independent exhibitions, and underground seminars, what demonstrates the dynamic spiritual life of society are the state-run theatres packed with audiences hungry for every meaningful word and the masses of people queued up in front of bookshops to obtain a copy of the latest novel by Bohumil Hrabal (no matter how expurgated it was) or even, for instance, a book on astronomy. Hundreds of youngsters travelling across the country in order to attend a concert, even though no one could be sure if it would really take place – can that really be called a ‘biafra of spirit?’, Havel asked.⁶²

He also contradicted the uncritical glorification of the achievements of alternative culture and suggested that “there are no more gifted writers, painters or musicians in Czechoslovakia today than there were at any time in the past (...)”. Since virtually anyone can type, then “even in samizdat, there will always be countless bad books or poems for every important book”, or perhaps even more bad ones in samizdat, as it is easier to type a text than to publish it. He also warned against a

⁶⁰ The 1950s generation included the young Bohumil Hrabal, Milena Jesenská’s daughter Honza Krejcarová, the visual artist Vladimír Boudník, the poet and visual artist Ivo Voseďálek, and the philosopher and poet Zbyněk Fišer *alias* Egon Bondy.

⁶¹ This metaphor was used by Louis Aragon and referred to the famine and starvation that the Igbo people of the short-lived Republic of Biafra (1967–1970) suffered during the Nigerian civil war.

⁶² Quoted from Václav Havel, “Six Asides about Culture,” in *Open Letters: Selected Prose 1965–1990*, ed. and trans. Paul Wilson (London: Faber, 1991), 273, 274.

sectarian attitude to alternative production, which tends to award merit just for the fact of not being officially presented, and, as a result, considers everything officially released as a sign of moral failure or even betrayal. In the conclusion of this now legendary text, Havel, in an almost prophetic voice, claims that, even though parallel, alternative, and unofficial movements were certainly “the sole bearer of the spiritual continuity of our cultural life”, he predicted that “it will be in the ‘first’ culture that the decisions will be made about the future climate of our lives; through it our citizens will have the first genuine, wide-scale chance to stand up straight and liberate themselves”.⁶³

The relationship between the ‘first culture’, that is, the official level, and the ‘second culture’, the alternative and underground level (a relationship constructed and to a large extent controlled by the communist regimes), is a major point of interest to anyone who has tried to explain the overall dynamics of Cold-War culture in the Soviet bloc. The Hungarian intellectual Miklós Haraszti, referring to what he calls “the fiction of two cultures”, argued that, at least in Hungary, there was simply no cultural space available *outside* the state sphere, as every cultural institution, including the artists themselves, were the property of the state anyway. In his view “this fiction (of two cultures) embodies the concept of artistic ‘truth’ or ‘authenticity’ and this innocent culture is juxtaposed to the tyranny of a state socialism that violates artists and deforms their work”. He regards the view that “free art is turned into directed art by censorship” as “deceptively optimistic” and having little to do with the complex reality of contemporary “socialist culture”.⁶⁴ However, in the Czech environment of late normalisation, Havel’s critical reflections on alternative cultural production and his prophetic statements concerning the future of the country’s culture challenged the assumption (often taken for granted by the dissent) about the key historical position of the oppositional sphere and its elites in generating change. In a sense he transferred the historical role of undermining the regime’s centralised cultural system from the oppositional ‘élite’ to ‘the people’, i.e. a social entity, seen as the silent or, to use Jiřina Šiklová’s term, ‘grey’ zone of brainwashed masses

⁶³ Ibid., 278, 283.

⁶⁴ Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison. Artists under State Socialism*. Foreword by George Konrád (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 69–70. First published in French in 1983, illegally in Hungarian in 1986.

incapable of any relevant action to subvert the establishment.⁶⁵ It was these 'ordinary', everyday readers who, in Havel's view, were not just passive objects of the cultural policies of the command system, but who, by hunting for any book worth reading out of the work released by both official and censored publishers, guaranteed the 'continuity of national culture', which otherwise tended to be associated with alternative textual production.

Havel's views on the role of the 'first culture' disturbed his contemporaries, such as Milan Jungmann, a former dissident literary scholar, who voiced his disagreement with Havel even five years after the demise of both official literature ("fragmented and raped" as he defined it) and "independent" literature, whose "purpose was to work towards re-unification of the fragmented branches in freedom". While Jungmann challenged the idea that "the so-called loss of an enemy took away the main motif in the writers work", he also argued that Havel's "prophecy was not fulfilled, since – at least in so far as literature is concerned – it was the formerly banned or intentionally non-publishing authors who took over the art initiative after 1989".⁶⁶ The fact that, contrary to Jungmann's contention, the post-1989 boom in the publication and reading of texts by former dissident and exiled authors was rather short-lived, and that post-1989 independent publishing institutions were by no means staffed purely, or even predominantly, by individuals recruited from former dissident circles, is an issue that will be addressed below. For the time being it is enough to note that Havel's views represented an attempt to move beyond the polemics within dissident circles and to challenge their feelings of moral superiority and exceptionality. He not only drew attention to the everyday cultural reception of the majority of the population, but also offered an opportunity to contemplate these anonymous day-to-day cultural experiences as possible agents of change.

However, some questions that need to be raised in any discussion of samizdat are not just whether it was or was not a "treasury of national culture", but *how* to study it and *what* to expect from that approach. In one of the key studies on this topic, Gordon Johnston identified three

⁶⁵ Jiřina Šiklová, "The 'Grey Zone' and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia," in M. Goetz-Stankiewicz (1992), 184. This notion will be discussed in a later chapter.

⁶⁶ Milan Jungmann, "Nezávislá literatura - vize a skutečnost," [Independent Literature – Vision and Reality], in *Česká nezávislá literatura ...* (1995), 11, 12.

reasons why samizdat keeps attracting scholarly attention.⁶⁷ One of the main reasons is its content, and, I would also add, particularly the ethical legacy of resistance to oppressive regimes that is conveyed in its content, for the study of samizdat tends to be seen as the leading means by which to keep such a legacy alive. The second direction in the study of samizdat focuses on the reactions of the state to the texts and their producers. The third study motivation is driven by an interest in the relationship between the texts and other organised forms of opposition and dissent. One has to support Johnston's view that these aspects are just fragments of a highly complex system. He bases his own analysis on Darnton's model of book production and reception, but also argues against applying it directly and universally to the specific situation of centrally controlled, Soviet-type book systems.⁶⁸

The Cold War institutional background of samizdat can also be examined from the perspective of 'communication networks', a model Darnton developed to analyse French culture of the late 18th century, or from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's 'field of cultural production', the concept he applied to the French literary scene of the second half of the 19th century, because samizdat involved all the major social relationships between the institutions of 'producers', 'mediators', and 'receivers', accompanied by 'intellectual influences' and 'social and political sanctions'.⁶⁹ Samizdat also produced its own legitimising rituals, which defined a specific book *habitus* and generated its own elites and reading masses, albeit ones whose hierarchic principles were perhaps very different from those Bourdieu identified in the French context.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it is important to note that most such models, including those of Hoggart, Altick, and even Escarpit, are based on the assumed existence of *market* aspects to a book's social function. Such an assumption is understandably present also in Darnton's work on what could be called alternative textual production, namely, on the inter-connections between the so-called official book market of the

⁶⁷ Gordon Johnston, "What is the History of Samizdat?" in *Social History* 24/2 (May 1999), 115–33.

⁶⁸ Johnston refers to Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books," in *The Kiss of Lamourette. Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990), 107–135.

⁶⁹ On Danton's model of "communication networks", see also Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-seller of Pre-revolutionary France* (London: Fontana Press/Harper Collins, 1996), 183.

⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," in *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. and intro. Randal Johnson (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993), 29–73.

French Old Regime and its illegal counterpart in the period before the French Revolution. Gordon Johnston argues that it is the commercial aspect in particular that raises the need for a different type of modelling in the case of samizdat production.

While certain kinds of market principles necessarily operated in Czech samizdat production, they were not the main driving force behind it at the levels of production and distribution, let alone reception. The economic and commercial aspects of alternative textual production, including paying for paper, reprography, and binding, honoraria for typists and distributors, are topics that have yet to be examined. It is perhaps worth noting that many of the accounts and bibliographies of samizdat compiled locally or internationally seem for the most part to play down references to economic aspects. Consequently, they tend to fall into a kind of methodological counter-trap of simply assuming there were no commercial or financial concerns connected with this activity. As Martin Machovec has pointed out, 'money talk' was a delicate and discrete matter in the context of pre-1989 samizdat production.⁷¹ Alongside the authors' perception of samizdat as a "activity of necessity and self-preservation", there was a legally instituted ban on "unlawful entrepreneurship", which would have provided yet another reason to persecute the producers of samizdat if detected. Consequently, the non-profit nature of this 'business' had to be carefully observed.

In general terms, there were two stages in the development of the economic base of samizdat: before and after 1977. While the 1970s were largely dominated by self-funded, low-cost volumes of 'wild samizdat' (*divoký samizdat*), after Charter 77 the underground became more closely linked with the dissent and their activities underwent a

⁷¹ For example, Martin Machovec noted how difficult it is to examine the ways in which samizdat was funded, and even individuals who were involved in its production largely refuse to comment on its economic background. Martin Machovec, "Jak si financovali undergroundoví autoři svůj samizdat?" [How Did Underground Authors Finance Their Samizdat?], a research paper delivered at the conference "Autor a peníze: Ekonomické souvislosti spisovatelské profese v české kultuře 19. a 20. století" [The Author and Money: The Economic Aspects of the Writing Profession in Czech Culture in the 19th and 20th Centuries], held 17–18 October 2007 at the Oddělení pro výzkum literární kultury Ústavu pro českou literaturu AV ČR. I would like to thank the author for providing me with an unpublished text of his paper. Machovec is also one of the coordinators of a project titled "Historie českého undergroundu" (History of the Czech Underground) conducted at the Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes] in Prague. See <http://www.ustrcr.cz/cs/historie-ceskeho-undergroundu>.

process of increasing institutionalisation. A part of this process were ever larger print runs and the use of more advanced reproduction technologies, which made samizdat production more expensive. It soon began to receive financial assistance from abroad provided by exile publishers, humanitarian organisations and independent foundations, such as the Charter 77 Foundation.⁷² For example, one underground periodical called *Vokno* (est. 1979), produced by František Stárek, who was jailed for two-and-a-half years for this activity, increased its print run from 100 to 380 copies and raised its price from an initial 20.00 Czechoslovak Crowns to 50.00 over the course of ten years. Production was largely self-financed and supported by sales, but resources (i.e. stencils) were also obtained by theft, as activists in actual fact stole materials from their civilian workplaces. *Revolver Revue*, an underground literary periodical run by the younger generation (Jáchym Topol), saw its print run grow from 60 to 500 copies between 1985 and 1989 and was selling for a sum in the range of 50.00 to 150.00 Czechoslovak Crowns, and it enjoyed support from both well-known (Timothy Garton Ash, Václav Havel, Vlastimil Harapes) and anonymous (“Hungarian and Polish friends”) individuals and organisations. Again, in every case, the principles of non-profit turnover and the rejection of financial gain were meticulously adhered to.⁷³

One rare piece of testimony on the day-to-day operations of samizdat production is found in Vaculík’s *Český snář*.⁷⁴ Although Vaculík makes very few concrete references to the actual ‘market’ aspects of his publishing project, it is clear that while he initially did much of the editorial and distribution work himself, the growing number of titles produced, for which more and more typists were required to type copies, must have made the entire operation gradually more and more resource-demanding. On several occasions he noted that the main incentive for starting the samizdat project was simply to copy and to distribute his own book *Morčata* (Guinea Pigs), which had been rejected by the state publishing houses. However, even the few notes on financial concerns that surface in his writing are framed in more general and abstract terms. He explains this ‘sensitive’ matter very cautiously: “I took care that there should be no reason for the project to be

⁷² František Janouch, “Stockholmská Nadace Charty 77 a podpora nezávislé literatury a jejích tvůrců,” in *Česká nezávislá literatura ...* (1995), 98–122.

⁷³ M. Machovec, “Jak si financovali...”

⁷⁴ Ludvík Vaculík, *Český snář*, [A Czech Dream-Book], (Brno: Atlantis, 1990).

accused of 'speculation' or profiteering. My practice was therefore to pay for paper, typing, and binding. The typists were paid the going rate for editorial assistance. And since the product was openly marked as a manuscript and bore the author's signature, I thought nothing could be held against it. I didn't even think of it as 'samizdat' of any kind, partly because it is a word I don't like. I used to present the authors with a bill for services rendered: they could buy their own work for such and such an amount".⁷⁵ Vaculík also mentioned that "at the height of its activity, *Petlice* had six copyists typing out stuff at the same time", and he emphasised the point that the main assault of the regime "was not directed against the authors but against the copyists, binders and organizers".⁷⁶ In other words, it was less the act of writing that the regime was concerned with and more the processes of textual production and dissemination that came under attack from the establishment. These were the processes that tended to give rise to networks of alternative institutions outside the control of the central authorities. The formal and ideological qualities of a text were not an issue, but they became an issue once they assumed the form of a *book*, no matter how imperfectly it was typed and bound. Vaculík actually names some of the individuals involved in the production part of the 'business', but, paradoxically, the numerous nameless typists (mainly women) and distributors, who were often the targets of some of the most aggressive harassment from the regime, remain essentially excluded from the narratives that canonise the glory of Czech samizdat.

The issue of the reception of samizdat is similarly overshadowed. The question of to what extent the distribution and reception of alternative texts was limited to a circle of engaged intellectuals, or whether anything like a 'common samizdat reader' really existed, has been raised since 1989, but it has not yet been satisfactorily answered. After all, most scholars of book studies would indorse Darnton's proposition that "reading remains the most difficult stage in the [book communication] cycle to understand".⁷⁷ As Darnton also noted, no matter how "suspiciously straightforward" the strategy of taking the list of best-sellers that circulated outside the law "as an adequate index to preferences of eighteenth century readers" may be, it does not enable us "to make reasonable inferences about what contemporaries saw as

⁷⁵ L. Vaculík in M. Goetz Stankiewicz (1992), 119.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁷⁷ R. Darnton (1996), 184.

threatening to the regime”.⁷⁸ In the specific case of samizdat, however, it is almost impossible to just reconstruct the bestseller list as evidence of the preferences of samizdat readers. While detailed bibliographies of samizdat titles exist, there is little evidence on how these titles were received, as there are simply no empirical data on the circulation or readership of these works.⁷⁹

Here it is important to underline the notion of reading as appropriation, a notion referred to by Darnton, and also used by Roger Chartier to challenge the idea that banned books “produced any consistent pattern of reader response and thus affected public opinion”.⁸⁰ In other words, even a samizdat volume, which, because of its material form (with typed and usually poorly bound pages) and the specific process (in a conspiratorial style) through which it was distributed, may have given rise to expectations of it communicating an ‘alternative’ message, cannot be seen as a tool for directly conveying a single fixed meaning. As Darnton also notes, what Michel de Certeau calls the “indefinite plurality of meanings” was certainly inherent in the act of reading samizdat, but the perception of these meanings always depended on particular cultural, political, social, and other frameworks, which were defined according to certain individual and certain shared values and expectations. Such meanings were not just free-floating ideas to be picked up randomly at any time. Instead, the samizdat reader would have made sense of the given text by, as Darnton puts it, “fitting perceptions into frames” inherited from their culture, social reality, and so on.⁸¹

Returning to the question of the possibly ‘communal’ nature of reading samizdat works, it is worth looking at some estimated figures on their distribution. Jiří Gruša has suggested that samizdat circulation was much less elite-oriented than is often assumed. A text typed on

⁷⁸ Ibid., 185.

⁷⁹ See J. Hanáková (1997); J. Posset (1991); J. Vlk et al., eds. (1993).

⁸⁰ R. Darnton (1996), 185. In his discussion of the notion of “appropriation”, Darnton refers to its usage by Roger Chartier, who draws on the work of Michel de Certeau and Richard Hoggart to theoretically develop this concept, while for historical examples he refers to his own work and the work of Carlo Ginsburg. See Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1966; 1st edition 1957); Roger Chartier, “Intellectual History and the History of *Mentalités*: A Dual Reevaluation,” in Roger Chartier, *Cultural History. Between Practices and Representations* (Cambridge: Polity in association with Blackwell, 1988), 40–42; Carlo Ginsburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1980); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Allen Lane, 1984).

⁸¹ R. Darnton (1996), 186.

carbon paper to produce up to fourteen copies would have circulated among approximately 150–300 readers. ‘Books’ of poetry, traditionally popular among Czech readers, could be quickly and easily retyped because they had fewer pages, so they may have had twice as many readers as other works. Three to five transcripts (fourteen copies each) of a text could circulate among as many as nearly 700 readers, while samizdat ‘bestsellers’, with up to thirty transcripts, could have reached as many as 4000 people. In purely economic terms, producing samizdat was not a cheap business. Gruša calculated that the costs of producing a hundred-page volume, including paper, typing and binding, would have been approximately 53.00 CSK by the early 1980s. A novel of 200 printed pages, which would have been equal to 400 typed samizdat pages, would have cost 200.00 CSK, a sum equal to about one-tenth of the average monthly salary.⁸² And perhaps even more important, the price of such a work in samizdat would have been approximately ten times the price of an average, officially published book of comparable size.

Most samizdat volumes were not intended just ‘for sale’ or to sit on a private bookshelf, but were instead meant to circulate continuously within a particular community. In fact, the act of reading samizdat could be viewed as the undermining of “the cultural hegemony of ‘the solitary reader’” that, for example, Elizabeth Long identified as the dominant feature of histories of reading.⁸³ The very act of reading samizdat largely took place in the relative ‘safety’ of private homes, but it was a social and collective practice in the sense that it involved group organisation and the respective processes of textual evaluation, hierarchisation, and legitimisation identified by Long, though in a different social and historical context. Moreover, unlike the traditional or standard reading process, which tends to be spread out over regular fragments of time, such as a half hour of reading before bedtime each evening, with the reader more or less exercising control over the timing of the reading, the samizdat reading experience involved a certain degree of intense reading, largely owing to (social, political, legal, etc.) pressures that were external to the immediate process of communication with a book.

⁸² J. Gruša (1992).

⁸³ Elizabeth Long, “Textual Interpretation as Collective Action,” in Jonathan Boyarin, ed., *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1993), 185.

This intensity derived from the limited amount of time a person was given to read one of these publications (often a couple of days or even just one night) and the special effort that had to be put into the very physical act of reading a not very legible copy typed on thin and nearly transparent paper, but it also stemmed from the community-related nature of the process. A reader of samizdat was aware of the uniqueness of this reading experience, of the fact that the same copy of a text was shared with a collective of peers defined by a set of more or less commonly shared views and understandings. Although people went to jail for producing or just distributing samizdat, the reading of samizdat largely lay beyond the direct control or penalising power of the authorities.⁸⁴ In this way, a 'common samizdat reader' would have experienced a certain sense of danger, but with relatively little real risk, and the excitement of indulging in forbidden fruit constituted a kind of act of resistance, a substitute for action for those who simply lacked the willingness or the courage to engage in open political protest. Sharing samizdat texts with close friends and family members, or just reading it, could make a person whose attitude towards the regime was otherwise apathetic feel like they were somehow making a stand. Reading samizdat or any 'alternatively' produced texts, including works released by exiled publishers,⁸⁵ was an experience different to that of reading officially published texts, and that applied to every reader – distinctions between 'elite' or 'common' readers do not help clarify the issue of textual reception in this context. The act of reading in this case could be seen as a kind of orgiastic experience that stood out from other

⁸⁴ For example, the current director of the *Libri Prohibiti Library* – a major collection of independent literature based in Prague – Jiří Gruntorád was jailed for four years (1980–1984) for the production and distribution of samizdat. The journalist, poet, and fiction writer Jaromír Šavrdá was jailed for two and half years (1978–1981) for the same activity. See Jiří Gruntorád, "Stručná historie čs. samizdatu," [A Brief History of Czechoslovak Samizdat], *Literární noviny* 13/29 (2002), 10–11; an exhibition titled *Jaromír Šavrdá – Vězeň svědomí* [Jaromír Šavrdá – Prisoner of Conscience] was held in the National Library in Clementinum in Prague from 29 May to 31 August 2008.

⁸⁵ For accounts and bibliographies of exiled production, see Jan Čulík, *Knihy za ohradou. Česká literatura v exilových nakladatelstvích 1971–1989*, [Books behind the Fence. Czech Literature in Exile Publishing Houses 1971–1989], (Prague: Trizonia, 1993); *Knihy českých a slovenských autorů vydané v zahraničí v letech 1948–1978 (exil): bibliografie*; Books by Czech and Slovak Authors Published Outside Czechoslovakia in Exile, 1948–1978: Bibliography; Bücher tschechischer und slowakischer Autoren herausgegeben im Ausland 1948–1978 (Exil): Bibliographie. Compiled by Ludmila Šeflová, introduction by Vilém Prečan (Brno: Doplněk, 1993).

ordinary experiences, in the way that festive occasions stand out from everyday events, from the commonplace.

However, there are a number of reasons to focus the analysis of pre-1989 book production and reception on the 'mainstream', official, state-supported, and controlled sphere of books. The first reason is that it was the day-to-day 'ordinary' act of buying, borrowing and reading books produced by the 'first culture', to use Havel's term, that occupied much of the book-consumption time of the 'grey' majority of the population. Books that people were queuing up for from five o'clock in the morning every Thursday (the day that the new titles of the week went on sale), books that were sold under the counter, books that were used to bribe one's dentist, books stored on the shelves of private libraries and books passed on from parents to children: for the most part these were officially released books, and a random visit to the living room of any of even the most committed dissidents would have easily proved as much. And these works included not just Hrabal's novels and Seifert's poetry – stripped off their most 'harmful' passages – but also children's stories, cookbooks, or mysteries produced by state-run publishers, despite the inevitably limited capacity of the command system of book production to fully satisfy readers' demands.

The second reason relates to methodology. As mentioned above, studies of communist regime-controlled culture have largely been concerned with the alternative and oppositional spheres, and the narratives of 'censorship' have dominated the portraits of the official spheres of culture. Consequently, the state-supported sphere of cultural production, including book production, has largely been understood in the somewhat limited terms of the direct exercise of power and the exclusion of a certain body of texts by a clearly defined, centrally positioned force. This notion of censorship is based on the assumption that 'banned books' simply disappear, an assumption that will be revisited in the next chapters.

Finally, there is the issue of a more general theoretical perspective. If the impulses of contemporary studies of culture, including the British tradition of Cultural Studies, are to be taken into consideration, the depiction of 'totalitarian' cultural and textual dynamics will have to go beyond the very power structure as embodied in the binary image of an angry guy drawing up lists of *libri prohibiti* and his 'noble' counterpart typing up samizdat works in a cellar. As Robert Darnton, as well as Natalie Zemon Davis, Lynn Hunt, and Carla Hesse have shown on

the example of the French Revolution, without an in-depth analysis of the institutional infrastructure of day-to-day book production, dissemination, and reading, it is difficult to understand not just the process of the conceptualisation of culture as such, but also the very notion of social change.⁸⁶ A point shared by Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, and Richard Hoggart is that *culture* – the specific sphere of social production and reception with which books tend to be associated – cannot be reduced to a set of (often ex post) canonised ideas and texts, but must be examined in terms of concrete, *everyday* social practices.⁸⁷ Only by incorporating these impulses into the study of ‘totalitarian books’ is it possible to return to the premise contained in Havel’s prophecy that the ‘official’ cultural space is where the centrally controlled system would begin to change. Even if – as many of Havel’s dissident contemporaries argued – by highlighting the importance of the ‘first culture’ he failed to see the significance of the oppositional political forces leading to change, the following question remains: where did all the anonymous individuals who, immediately after the Velvet Revolution, were ready to set up private publishing projects, to edit, print, and ultimately buy hundreds of thousands of copies of Kundera’s and Hrabal’s novels in the ‘liberated’ book market come from? In order to address this question, the institutions responsible for the existence of centrally controlled books and the principles of representation of these institutions must be examined.

⁸⁶ Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Natalie Ann Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Lynn Avery Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); Carla Hesse, *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris 1786–1810* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991).

⁸⁷ Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1983); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1966; 1st edition 1957).

CHAPTER FOUR

SUPPRESSING THE MARGINS

"I would like to point out one more indicator of the rising general standard of living among our people. This is the increase in the print runs of books, the price of which we have reduced by more than twenty percent on average during the past year. The average print run is at least six times higher in our country now than in capitalist times. At the same time, it is only the shortage of paper that keeps blocking further growth in print runs. And it is no longer that kind of shilling-shocker trash, but truly valuable literature, fiction and non-fiction, that we are referring to. There is no doubt that this is very convincing evidence of the increasing material and cultural standards of our people, because it shows that people not only desire books but that they can also afford them."

From the New Year's Address of President Klement Gottwald delivered
on 1 January 1951¹

These are the words of the first 'working-class president', Klement Gottwald, as spoken in his New Year Address in 1951, in the most brutal period of Stalinist repression.² They illustrate a number of points. Not only do they show the important position of books in the "historical struggle for better tomorrows" being waged by the communist leaders, but they also reveal the dominant features of the discourse that was employed in the representation of books as such and of their assigned social role. Figures, numbers, and quantitative arguments in general were among the most powerful tools of discourse used to represent printed matter. It was the *quantity* of various book-related issues,

¹ Klement Gottwald, *O kultuře a úkolech inteligence v budování socialismu* [On Culture and the Tasks of the Intelligentsia in the Process of Building Socialism], (Prague: SNPL, 1954), 94. Originally published in *Rudé právo* 31/1 (3 January 1951), 1–2.

² The Stalinist show trials of leading intellectuals, politicians, and writers accused of treason and espionage culminated in the summer of 1950. Among those executed in this process were, for example, the lawyer, politician, and feminist Milada Horáková and the leftwing journalist and writer Závěš Kalandra, both of them concentration camp survivors. The total number of victims of the repression of the early 1950s is estimated – even in the most basic accounts of Czech and Slovak history – at between 200 000 and 280 000. See Jiří Pokorný, *The Czech Lands 1918–1994* (Prague: Práh, 1994).

such as the number of titles and volumes, the amount of paper, (low) book prices, and so on, that made it possible for books to be constructed as a measure of the *quality* of life. Within this framework of (more or less) positive quantitative data, a book could also be employed as prime evidence of the progressive development of 'socialist' society as a whole. The brief excerpt of the president's speech itself demonstrates the way in which this ambitious idea was constructed and enforced.

In his references to the achievements of the 'new' book system, Gottwald is clearly focusing on the production side of books, while the reception side is reduced to the issue of the accessibility of 'affordable' books. The somewhat Enlightenment-like assumption that the availability of certain kinds of printed matter alone automatically generates communities of readers capable of meeting desired social expectations is certainly a part of the story here. But even this short excerpt demonstrates one of the key issues of centrally controlled publishing policy: It was an attempt to increase the number of copies, as Gottwald notes, accompanied by reductions in the overall number of titles, as Gottwald alludes to subtly in his reference to "truly valuable literature". By allowing the number of titles to lag behind the increasing print runs, the communist cultural policy makers were following two basic objectives. First, their clear intention was to expand and thus in some sense democratise access to printed matter by increasing the number of available copies of a certain text. Consequently, the number of individuals who could read a certain text could be increased, too. Second, however, the resources (i.e. mainly paper, but also printing, distribution, and other facilities) that the regime was able and willing to actually invest in book production were limited. As a result, by multiplying the number of copies, it was necessary to strictly control and reduce the number of titles a reader had access to.

A system was set up that *de facto* limited the possibility people had to personally choose between different printed texts. Moreover, there was a major advantage to decreasing the number of titles while increasing print runs: it not only facilitated the process of central control over the production and reception of published texts, but also established itself as one of the dominant principles of the command book system. Reductions in the number of titles were – at least at the level of propagandist rhetoric – justified by the need to eliminate certain (in the authorities' view) 'unacceptable' authors and genres, at least in the early post-war years, and they often used the argument of paper shortages to explain the absence of these works. The process of eliminating certain

titles from production and distribution affected not just the texts that seemed or actually were openly hostile to the regime, but also so-called trash and popular literature, and it was largely directed at determining the tastes and attitudes of the 'common reader', that is, mostly members of the lower and broader strata of society. The President's words point to one of the key arguments of this study: that the conceptual framework necessary to explain the constitutive principles of centrally controlled cultural and book production must go beyond the popular but rather exclusive notion of censorship, understood exclusively as a process of imposing lists of banned texts on a certain community, and must instead take in the more inclusive concept of the printed word and instituted access to it.

Soviet cultural experts often made use of quantitative evidence to explain the current state of book-related affairs when they expounded on the profound difference between the faults of the pre-communist period and the achievements of the communist era. Thus, for example, F. J. Korovin, a dean at the Moscow State Institute of Culture, noted in a paper he gave at a Czechoslovak-Soviet seminar on popular education in Prague in 1967 that the number of public libraries in the Soviet Union was 117 times higher in the 1960s than in 1914, and the total number of books was dramatically increasing, too. While in 1914 there were 6 books per 100 inhabitants in the country's libraries, in 1967 there were 47 books per 100 inhabitants.³ Clearly, no Czech policy maker or analyst could have come up with data of equal argumentative strength to defend the achievements of the centralised cultural system in the domestic contexts. Unlike pre-revolutionary Russia, Czechoslovakia before the communist coup had a high rate of literacy and an established network of libraries, which by 1937 offered over 9 million books to a population of 14 million – or roughly 65 books per 100 inhabitants.⁴ Though not without its problems (particularly

³ Quoted from *Československo-sovětský seminář k aktuálním otázkám kulturně osvětové práce 27–30 XI 1967* [Czechoslovak-Soviet Seminar on Current Issues of Cultural and Popular Education, 27–30 November 1967], (Osvětový ústav v Praze. Prague: SNTL, 1970) in Marie Huláková, *Demokratizace kultury v ČSSR v mezinárodním srovnání: přístup ke vzdělání, lidové knihovny, neperiodický tisk a hromadné sdělovací prostředky ve světle mezinárodních statistik* [Democratisation of Culture in the ČSSR in an International Comparison: Access to Education, Public Libraries, Books and Mass Media in the Light of International Statistics], (Prague: Ústav pro výzkum kultury, 1971), 212.

⁴ In 1937, a decade before the communist coup, there were 16 647 public libraries in Czechoslovakia, which contained a total of 9 048 000 books. Data from 1950 refer to a figure twice as high (18 057 000 books), but also to a decrease in the number

following the economical crises of the early 1930s), the book market was nonetheless flexible and functional and generally capable of responding to the diverse demands of consumers by producing books in sufficient quantities.⁵

These facts and the 5903 book titles that Czech publishers alone were already producing by 1933⁶ show that, while readership would still have been an issue when the communist government took over, a different focus was required if the given system was to be transformed. Instead of trying to *construct* the reader, which is what Soviet Russia had essentially tried to do thirty years earlier, the goal in Czechoslovakia was to *reconstruct* the reader. That task, wrapped in slogans about the 'democratisation of culture' and 'freedom of speech', was to be achieved by meddling with the balance between the number of titles published and the size of the print runs. Statistical data – though of questionable validity and possibly manipulated to provide a better picture of the cultural environment of each regime – are currently the main source for obtaining at least some picture of the main trends in book production during the communist era.⁷

of public libraries (14 676). See *Historická statistická ročenka ČSSR* [Historical Statistical Yearbook], (Prague: SNTL, Alfa, 1985), 863, 397. Just to compare the number of books and libraries to the number of potential readers, according to the census of 1930, the population of the Bohemia and Moravia was 10,674,386 and the population of Slovakia was 3,329,793, that is 14,004,179 inhabitants in Czechoslovakia in total. See *Historická ...*, (1985), 869.

⁵ For a detailed account of the post-1918 situation in publishing and the impact of the 1930s crisis on this area, see the memoirs of Ladislav Kuncíř, *Život pro knihu* [A Life for Books], (Purley: Rozmluvy, 1985).

⁶ See *Historické údaje. Kultura. Tisk. Neperiodický (knihy)* [Historical Data. Culture. The Press. Non-periodicals (Books)], Český statistický úřad, <http://www.czso.cz> (accessed 11 November 2005).

⁷ There are essentially two sources of such data in the Czechoslovak (till 1992) and Czech contexts. The first is the data collected by the Czech Statistical Office and published annually in their *Statistical Yearbooks of the Czech Republic*. Data in former Czechoslovakia were collected by the Federal Statistical Office and published in *Statistická ročenka ČSSR* [Statistical Yearbook of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic - till 1989] and in *Statistická ročenka České a Slovenské Federativní Republiky* [Statistical Yearbooks of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic - 1990–1992]. Historical comparative data on former Czechoslovakia are available in historical statistical yearbooks [*Historická statistická ročenka ČSSR*] and also on-line at the website of Czech Statistical Office, <http://www.czso.cz>. The second source is the *Česká národní bibliografie - ČNB* [Czech National Bibliography], which lists every book published in the Czech Republic and is stored in the National Library in the so-called 'conservation fund', which contains the mandatory copies every publisher is legally required to contribute to the fund. It includes mainly Czech titles (since 1901), and there are also some Slovak titles, but these are gradually being deleted from the ČNB databases. For the ČNB online,

Non-periodical publications in former Czechoslovakia 1948–1980⁸

	1948	1950	1953	1960	1970	1980
No. of titles - Czechoslovak	6640	3797	7168**	6893	6235	7324
No. of copies – Czechoslovak*	44 176	84 358	54 180	51 430	80 124	90 412
No. of titles - Czech	5446	2737	3720**	4971	3955	4143
No. of copies - Czech*		68 923	42 150	39 884	59 483	64 793
No. of titles - Slovak	1194	1060	1495**	1922	2280	3181
No. of copies - Slovak*		15 453	12 030	11 546	20 641	25 619

* Copies in thousands.

** Since 1953, the figures on book production include music sheets, maps, university teacher's notes and atlases.

The table of selected figures shows that between 1948 and 1950 alone, that is, in the first two years after the communists took power, the number of published titles dropped by almost half.⁹ At the same time, the total number of printed copies almost doubled, meaning that the size of the average print run increased from 6600 to 22 000 per title. Clearly, the 'working-class president' was exaggerating slightly when

see www.nkp.cz. The figures presented by these two sources basically jointly reflect the major trends in book production, such as declines and/or increases in particular time periods. In concrete figures, however, they may also vary significantly, for the ČNB tends to have a record of titles that may otherwise not be included in the statistical definition of a book.

⁸ "ČSSR - Kultura, CSR - Kultura, SSR - Kultura; Tisk a filmová tvorba," [Czechoslovak, Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics - Culture, Press and Film], in *Historická statistická ročenka ČSSR* [Historical Statistical Yearbook], (Prague: SNTL, Alfa, 1985), 397, 599, 798. Czechoslovak copies from 1948 in M. Huláková (1971), 132.

⁹ A similar trend towards a reduction of production immediately after the Communist coup was observed in the film industry, too. While forty-five full-length Czech films were released in 1937, the number fell to eighteen in 1948 and then rose again to forty-three in 1970 at the end of the liberal 1960s. However, the privatisation of the film industry was followed by a drop in production from fifty-three films in 1985 to just nineteen in 1995. See "Kultura," [Culture], Český statistický úřad, http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/kultura_hu (accessed 20 April 2007).

he talked about a sixfold increase in print runs, but a quick look at developments as recorded in statistics reveals that the prevailing intent of communist cultural policy was to reduce the variety of available titles in favour of the number of copies. A similar trend could be observed in the production of periodicals, whose total number dropped from 1479 titles in 1948 to 1121 in 1956 and continued to fall to reach 759 titles in 1980, which is half of the pre-1948 level.¹⁰ A considerable drop in print runs and, particularly, the sudden growth in book titles in 1953 did not signify any dramatic change in publishing policy. It was instead the result of the statistical redefinition of a book to include music sheets, university teaching notes, and textbooks, all publications that also came out in smaller print runs.

It is also impossible not to notice that, at least according to the available statistical records, the most intense upheavals (and thus interventions) in the number of produced titles and copies occurred in the Czech part of the country's book production. The figures on Slovak production seem to indicate a more continuous, though relatively slower development, and while a 2:1 principle of a 'fair' balance between the two countries was applied in most other sectors of national production, it was certainly not met in this particular sector. We can only speculate about the reasons for these differences. Was it one of the intentions of centralised cultural policy to 'punish' the more 'active' Czech book production by reducing the number of titles it published, especially in the years just after 1948 and 1968? Or was this an attempt to support supposedly 'underdeveloped' Slovak publishing? Or was it because the Slovak cultural authorities had a more flexible cultural and publishing strategy, especially in the post-1968 normalisation period? Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that Czechoslovak book production did not regain its pre-1948 level of output until the mid-1960s, and it took another half a decade before Czech production caught up.¹¹

One example of how the command system production of copies and titles operated is provided by Vyšehrad publishing house, a publisher with a strong pre-war tradition, and one that was under especially close

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The discrepancy between the developments in Czech and Slovak book production continued even more intensely during the 1970s and the 1980s, when the production of Czech titles stagnated (3955 titles in 1970 compared to 4143 in 1980) while the number of Slovak titles grew continually (2280 and 3181 respectively).

surveillance from the communist regime because of the religious and generally spiritual focus of its titles. It was originally established in 1934 as a small, essentially Catholic venture that published both fiction and texts on philosophy and theology, but its range of titles and genres quickly expanded. When, for example, in 1938 Vyšehrad released the first and commercially very successful Czech translation of A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*, this was not just a good marketing decision, but was also seen as an attempt to add some light to the otherwise dark years leading up to the Second World War. The house experienced a major boom in the early years of the Second World War, when it was mainly publishing Czech authors in print runs in the tens of thousands. Its success stemmed partly from the overwhelming patriotism that spread through the local population in reaction to the German occupation, and it certainly was not the only publishing enterprise that benefited from the reading public's hunger for the Czech printed word.

One of Vyšehrad's former editors offered an explanation for the boom in publishing during the war, and his arguments somewhat contradict the established images of the decline and misery of national culture traditionally associated with the war years. According to his testimony, the house flourished, because "people had enough money and nothing to spend it on". And despite German censorship prohibiting the publication of Jewish authors and of texts that originated in countries currently at war with Germany, "Vyšehrad did not publish a single title that would not have been published under normal circumstances at any other time".¹² In addition, the editor-in-chief had good contacts with the 'right' people among the German authorities, so even getting a supply of paper, which was otherwise subject to strict restrictions owing to war shortages, was not a major problem. After 1948 Vyšehrad was nationalised and re-established under a different name in order to focus on 19th-century rural Czech prose, which is also mentioned in Huláková's account of this period. During the Stalinist repressions of the early 1950s, most of staff members and people who worked for the house part time were jailed for their alternative political views. However, the house continued to function, albeit with a strictly limited editorial profile and under a different name. Leaving aside the content of the published texts, the figures on the number of titles

¹² *70 let nakladatelství Vyšehrad 1934 – 2004* [70 Years of the Publishing House Vyšehrad 1934 – 2004], (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2004), 30, 32.

produced by this publishing house during some key years of its existence echo the overall development of the command system of publishing policy.¹³

1934 – 7	1953 – 14
1937 – 38	1960 – 20
1940 – 92	1968 – 14
1942 – 38	1969 – 49
1944 – 34	1970 – 55
1946 – 59	1971 – 37
1947 – 101	1980 – 30
1948 – 89	1989 – 25
1949 – 32	1990 – 36
1951 – 61	2000 – 87

Although one of the publishing house's most productive periods was in the early war years, a sharp decline occurred in 1942, when, after the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi regime subjected the local community to severe reprisals and further restricted its cultural and intellectual life.¹⁴ Like many other publishers in the country, Vyšehrad's production grew again in 1947–1948, when it tried to make the most of the post-war relaxation of political constraints. But it suffered a dramatic decline in the number of titles after 1948, which continued until 1969. Around 1952, unsurprisingly, pro-communist propagandistic titles such as *Far Away from Moscow* or *We Are Building Socialism* were released, but during that same year the house also released titles that had no connection to the dominant political agenda, such as a new translation of Dante's *La Divina Commedia*. The relatively productive years of 1969 and 1970 were the outcome of editorial plans prepared in the liberalisation period of the late 1960s, and as another former editor of the house noted, "the invasion of troops [in 1968] only delayed those plans, but that was not enough to suppress all encouraging cultural activities entirely".¹⁵ In the 1970s and 1980s, the

¹³ Ibid., 87.

¹⁴ On SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Tristan Eugen Heydrich (1904–1942), see Mario R. Dederichs, *Heydrich: The Face of Evil* (London: Greenhill Books, 2006); Callum A. MacDonald, *The Killing of Obergruppenfuhrer Reinhard Heydrich. 27 May 1942* (London: Macmillan London, 1989).

¹⁵ *70 let nakladatelství Vyšehrad...*, (2004), 25. The publishing house *Lidová demokracie* received its name in 1953 from the Czechoslovak People's Democratic Party, which was its official operator and supervisor and was one of the few non-communist parties permitted in the Communists'-dominated Parliament. In 1968,

number of titles Vyšehrad was producing fell substantially and remained low for most of the time up until 1989; it was publishing around half of what it published in 1970 and one-quarter of what it published before 1948. There was no substantial increase in the number of titles published until the late 1990s, after Vyšehrad finally managed to survive the complex privatisation processes of the 1990s.

With this picture of post-1945 publishing in mind, it is worth stressing that, while the first institutional steps towards a centrally controlled system of culture were taken in Czechoslovakia in May 1945, that is, less than three years before the communist coup, the Communist Party was not the first to regulate the flow of printed matter, and such practices can be traced back for centuries. Reflections on more recent developments in book production and reception in this specific context should be informed by the larger historical framework, and that warrants a brief but inevitably simplified detour at this point. In history many arguments have been used to justify intervening in the process of communication with a book. Pro-regulative tendencies in a sense represented a reaction to the general growth in book production once (high) book prices and the (low) literacy rate no longer served as barriers to prevent the population across all social strata from having access to the massively expanding pool of printed texts. Such arguments followed another key objective: the need to centrally propagate state policy and ideology. As the case of Koniáš (mentioned above) showed, Bohemian socio-cultural history is particularly rich in stories of repressive measures particularly targeting books.¹⁶

numerous key representatives of local cultural life signed a petition requesting that the house re-assume its original name, and that name has stayed with it – despite a somewhat complicated privatisation in 1989 – to date.

¹⁶ Some contemporary scholars might date the origin of the powerful status of Czech books back to the Counter-Reformation (Ducreux) or even the 14th century. See Alfred Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia: Czech Literature and Society, 1310–1420* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). For example, one of the leading figures of the 'normalisation' sociology of culture, Marie Huláková, in her monograph on the process of post-war 'democratisation' of culture, takes the locally held "myth of the superior position of the Czechs in their attitude to books and reading" as the starting point of her discussion of the contemporary situation of book production and reception. She defines this idea as rooted in a Romantic vision of the national past dating back to the Revivalist period. According to this 'myth', Czechs allegedly top all international scales in terms of the number of libraries, the number of regular readers, the number of hours spent reading per week, and, indeed, the number of books produced per capita, etc. See Marie Huláková, *Demokratizace kultury v ČSSR v mezinárodním srovnání: přístup ke vzdělání, lidové knihovny, neperiodický tisk a hromadné sdělovací prostředky ve světle mezinárodních statistik* [Democratisation

Regulatory and interventionist efforts targeting local book production were indeed a part of the country's religious history, particularly the reformist movements that flourished in the Czech lands a hundred years before Luther, and the subsequent re-Catholicisation of the population after the Battle of White Mountain.¹⁷ These social and religious conflicts further reinforced social visibility and the position of the book as a key target of 'oppression', whether this came from royal, religious, or just administrative authorities. In an analysis of archival records of the interrogations conducted during the Austrian inquisition in the Bohemian provinces in the 18th century, Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux noted that "locating heretics was organized around the presence of books, since the book made the heretic".¹⁸ Nevertheless, even during the 19th century, that is, during the period of increased pressure from the growing Czech nationalist cultural and intellectual movement, Austrian book control was not just about the exercise of power by Habsburg censors, it was about the overall strong centralisation tendencies that the empire pursued in many spheres of social life. Interventions in print and book-related institutions, such as the censoring order installed in 1810, the purpose of which was, among other things, to protect culturally underdeveloped and incompetent ('common') readers from 'harmful' texts (i.e. novels), were not excepted from this general political and administrative trend.¹⁹

A complex relationship existed between cultural development in 18th-century Bohemia, the reforms introduced by the absolutist Habsburg Monarchy, and emerging Czech nationalism. The beginnings of the "remarkable Czech cultural and linguistic revival in Bohemia, initially the work of a small group of intellectuals" roughly coincided with the period when Maria Theresa and Joseph II introduced their

of Culture in the ČSSR in an International Comparison: Access to Education, Public Libraries, Books and Mass Media in the Light of International Statistics] (Prague: Ústav pro výzkum kultury, 1971).

¹⁷ For a brief overview of the regulatory interventions in the book production and distribution in the context of Bohemia, with a special focus on entertainment and popular texts, see P. Janáček (2004), 20–32.

¹⁸ Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, "Reading unto Death: Books and Readers in Eighteenth-Century Bohemia," in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 199. At the same time, as James Naughton has remarked, "Czech imaginative literature derived new impetus from the re-Catholicisation, if not from the political changes," in James Naughton, *Traveller's Literary Companion to Eastern & Central Europe* (Brighton: In Print, 1995), 54.

¹⁹ See P. Janáček (2004), 29–30.

educational reforms in the areas of education (the Ordinance of 1774 established universal primary schooling) and religion (the Tolerance Patent), which was followed by the adoption of German as the one official language of the state.²⁰ In the long run, by encouraging an increase in literacy, these centrally issued and controlled interventions also increased the number of people in the population who had access to reading and further education. The spread of literacy was also accompanied by a controversial development in the local publishing business in the 18th century, which Czech book historians have referred to as “the period of the most glaring publishing contradictions”.²¹ The dramatic increase in the number of titles and copies published combined with the spread of reading skills among the ‘common folk’ certainly contributed to an increase in the size of the reading public. At the same time, the variable quality of the texts, particularly the rise in the production of dream books, almanacs, and miscellanea, also supported the dissemination of superstitions and prejudices. In 1782, the Czech local authorities even complained to the Emperor Joseph II about the poor content of the printed matter produced and distributed in the provinces. The feeling was that, instead of thrusting abstract ‘enlightened’ ideas on the people, they could be encouraged to read if they had useful texts to read, so the Habsburg court initiated and supported the production of a wider range of ‘how to’ booklets on farming, gardening and medical treatment.

The period of Josephine reforms is a good example of the kinds of controversies that can be generated by any interventionist and regulatory policies, particularly in the area of the cultural and intellectual life of a certain community. The historian Miroslav Hroch has noted that the public perception of Joseph’s reforms and of the monarch himself was far from unequivocal.²² Josef V. Polišenský has pointed out that

²⁰ Agnew Hugh LeCaine, *Origins of the Czech National Renaissance* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 1993), 15.

²¹ Bohatcová, Miriam, et al., eds., *Česká kniha v proměnách století* (Prague: Panorama, 1990), 310.

²² On the one hand, he was popularly and uncritically adored as the ‘Emperor of the poor’ among the rural population, mainly owing to the fact that he abolished serfdom in 1791. The urban middle classes, the nobility, and the clergy were strongly opposed to his reforms, which represented major changes to the old order and a consequent weakening of their power. Some of his opponents held Joseph responsible for “inspiring” peasant uprisings in the 1770s, and others even saw the wars and famine that hit the population during his reign as a form of divine punishment for his reforms. See Miroslav Hroch, *Na prahu národní existence* [On the Threshold of National Existence], (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1999), 36 – 42.

Joseph's insistence on German as the *lingua franca* of Central Europe, a fact much scorned in later Czech nationalist historiography, was mainly driven by his practical concerns for the expanding multi-lingual monarchy. He allowed all important decrees to be published also in Czech and did not oppose the production of Czech books, even apologetic texts promoting the Czech language.²³ The increase in the production of pro-Czech texts was a consequence of and a reaction to Joseph's protection of German culture and language. His reforms gave rise to local forces whose interests diverged from those of the absolutist monarchy, and his centralising efforts eventually lost ground to the territorial patriotism of the local nobility.²⁴ Paradoxically, near-universal literacy would have been largely responsible for creating a more informed public and therefore for the public's capacity to support local nationalist elite groups in their efforts to subvert the absolutist regime that enforced compulsory literacy in the first place. This period established the tradition of interventionism in relation to books and reading, a tradition that, along with its subversive potential, would go much further in the next century.

Leading National Revivalists were generally convinced – and local history supported this view – that books written in Czech were valuable tools in the nationalist struggle, and consequently the supply of printed texts dedicated to the “enhancement of Czech language and literature” required institutionalised support, coordination and regulation.²⁵ Regulatory tendencies were usually immediately followed by instructive and prescriptive arguments and actions, driven by the idea

²³ Just to stress the significance of the linguistic aspects of the nationalist struggle, it is worth noting that by the early 19th century, in 1801, the first Chair in Czech language and literature (Jan Nejedlý) was appointed at the Prague University in 1810, lessons in Czech language were introduced into theology courses, and it was only in 1816 that the Czech language was introduced as an optional subject at secondary schools (*gymnasium*), and even this change was followed by the decline of Czech language in the 1820s. See M. Hroch, (1999), 134, 135, 184.

²⁴ Josef V. Polišenský, *History of Czechoslovakia in Outline* (Prague: Bohemia International, 1991), 81–82.

²⁵ A good example of organised cooperative, and regulative practices was *Matice česká*, a major pro-nationalist foundation, cultural centre and publishing body set up in 1831 to support the publication of texts in Czech based on contributions from the organisation's members. The number of subscribers reached 2,672 in 1848 and even 3,773 by 1851. *Matice* also had its own honoraria policy and became the first publishing company in the country to introduce an editorial series back in the 1840s. See Karel Tiefertunk, *Dějiny Matice české* [The History of *Matice česká*], (Prague: V kommissi u Františka Rívnače, Nákladem Matice české, 1881). See also the official website of *Matice*: <http://www.nm.cz/snm/matice.htm> (accessed 20 June 2009).

of protecting the interests of the Czech 'common' reader. The Bohemian book market was also influenced by an important institutional step towards regulating and controlling the book market in Austria, which was the establishment of the *Borsenverein der deutschen Buchhändler* in Vienna in 1860. This professional institution controlled book prices, successfully fought pirate publishers, coordinated relations between authors and publishers, balanced book imports with exports, and introduced legal amendments to regulate the market.

After coming into major conflict with the Austrian management, in 1879 the Czech members of this institution set up *Spolek českých knihkupců a nakladatelů* (Association of Czech Booksellers and Publishers), and the founding members included the legendary publishers J. R. Vilímek, J. Otto, and F. Topič. In addition to its other, regular professional publishing activities, the association issued catalogues of books in print, organised book fairs, and coordinated professional education. Although the number of printed books multiplied during the First Republic, the institutional basis of their production and distribution remained essentially the same. But as Aleš Zach, a leading scholar of Czech 19th-century publishing history, has noted, as soon as Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918 voices began calling for the book industry to be nationalised. This was partly a reaction to the post-war crisis in book sales. During the First World War book sales boomed, as women, who suddenly found themselves in charge of the family budget, were buying more books. But that ended with the war, and the book market in the new republic was flooded with anti-Austrian texts that were by that time outdated and thus unsaleable in the new post-1918 political context.²⁶

With the founding of independent, democratic Czechoslovakia, new professional organisations and guilds were established all over the country. These included *Obchodní družstvo českých knihkupců* (Trade Co-operative of Czech Booksellers), which was set up in 1918 for the purpose of allowing its members to jointly store and distribute their production, and *Záložna knihkupců a nakladatelů* (Savings Bank of Booksellers and Publishers), established in 1919. However, even in an environment of mostly market-driven private publishing, there already

²⁶ For a brief summary of Czech publishing history, see Aleš Zach, "Nakladatelství v české kulturní historii 19. a 20. století," [Publishing in the Czech Cultural History of the 19th and 20th Centuries], at <http://www.pribramska.cz/knih/prednasky/nakl1.html> (accessed 10 November 2005).

existed some publishing ventures that enjoyed central state support and consequently were free from the pressures of the market. One of them was Orbis, previously a private company, which was used and financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to produce and distribute materials propagating the interests of the young republic abroad. Despite its clearly defined mission, during the 1920s and 1930s some leading intellectuals and poets worked in its editorial team. One of them was František Halas,²⁷ under whose management Orbis released major historical, sociological and political texts, along with high-quality tour guides.²⁸ But as Zach noted, even before the communist coup, Orbis served as an example of “a typical state company, where money is being pumped in and the achievements are rather poor”, while its day-to-day operations “more or less contradicted all the principles of private publishing”. It became wrapped up in the “dark games of the intelligence services”, and during the Second World War it was one of the very few Czech houses that openly collaborated with the Nazi regime by producing anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi texts.²⁹

²⁷ One of the most distinguished Czech lyrical poets of the 20th century, translator and journalist František Halas (1901–1949) grew up in a working class family in Moravia. His only formal education consisted of elementary school and an apprenticeship period in a bookstore in Brno, while most of his extensive knowledge of world culture and literature he acquired through reading. Since his youth he was involved in leftist cultural circles (‘proletarian poetry’, *Devětsil*) and contributing to left-oriented periodicals. During the war he was a member of the anti-Nazi resistance group *Národní revoluční výbor spisovatelů* [National Revolutionary Committee of Writers] and soon after the war took on a number of public offices, including the membership in the National Assembly. Although in his essayist and poetic work he was a committed supporter of the unprivileged and of the idea of social justice, his poems always included the most intense and painful search for a poetic form and exhibited sensitivity to the specific expressive qualities of the Czech language and an awareness of absurd dilemmas of the modern world. His latest work reflected his deep disillusion with post-war developments (unfinished poem *A co?* – “What Now?”), and consequently, soon after his death, he became a subject of sharp criticism from the literary establishment of the 1950s. (Ladislav Štoll, *Tricet let bojů za českou socialistickou poezii* [The Thirty-Year Struggle for Czech Socialist Poetry], 1950). See Michal Bauer, *Tíseň tmy - aneb Halasovské interpretace po roce 1948* [The Pressure of Darkness - or Interpretations of Halas after 1948], (Prague: Akropolis, 2005); Ludvík Kundera, *František Halas: o životě a díle: 1947–1999* [F. H.: His Life and Work: 1947–1999], (Brno: Atlantis, 1999). In English see Richard Svoboda, “František Halas,” <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Halas.html> (accessed 20 April 2009).

²⁸ Aleš Zach, *Stopami pražských nakladatelských domů: Procházka mizějící paměti českých kulturních dějin* [In the Footsteps of Prague Publishing Houses: A Walk through the Fading Memory of Czech Cultural History], (Prague: Thyrus, 1996), 72–74.

²⁹ In addition, this house was among the very few that was able to continue most of its activities after 1948, because it never experienced the changes in management

In other words, after 1948 there were significant attempts to regulate and control book production, attempts that had been part of the socio-cultural dynamics of the country for decades, if not centuries, prior to the actual communist coup d'état. As the poet Jiří Gruša put it, "Czech society has been particularly inclined to accept such an (i.e. socialist) orientation ... as it tended to set up its tasks rather in terms of re-distribution than in terms of achieving particular goals. An ideal of properly re-distributed estates has always been considered to be a more meaningful project than their very production".³⁰ Thus, the story of the cultural dynamics of the 20th-century "totalitarian" state cannot be limited to "the traditional – and in itself depressing enough – picture of culpable communists".³¹ Many scholars and observers have stressed how much continuity there was in Central European post-war political and cultural development in the sense that pro-socialisation and pro-centralisation tendencies were not just imports from the Soviet East. Miklós Haraszti even suggested that intellectuals and artists generally, at least in the countries ruled by Soviet-style political regimes, "celebrated the rise of socialist power as their liberator". In most of these countries, "by the time the Communist Party openly took power, the majority of artists were already committed to loyal service". They were driven by a belief that they would "greatly contribute to the elimination of exploitation".³² Although Milan Kundera has pointed out that the communists did not come to power in Czechoslovakia as a result of violence and bloodshed but with the backing of half the country's population, and what's more, as Vladimir V. Kusin reminds us, it was the 'better', more intelligent and more dynamic half, in the history of the Czech nation socialism as a socially just form of democracy was a long-sought objective, but that was something different from the autocratic social and governmental system established by the Communist Party.³³

or profile that other publishing houses were subjected to. It preserved its orientation towards political and propagandistic texts, though apparently with a different ideological focus, and continued to enjoy the supervision and support of a governmental body. A. Zach, "Nakladatelství v české ...".

³⁰ J. Gruša (1992), 2.

³¹ Ibid., 2.

³² Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison. Artists under State Socialism*, foreword by George Konrád (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 42. First published in French in 1983, illegally in Hungarian in 1986.

³³ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 8; Vladimir V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the*

The years between May 1945 and February 1948 were a key period, during which the centrally controlled social and cultural system that would be installed after 1948 was prepared. In his detailed account of Czech intellectual and cultural dynamics after the Second World War, Bradley F. Abrams argued that the communists' rise to power in Central and Eastern Europe and the subsequent installation of a command-system of production in every sphere of life cannot simply be understood as having been engineered by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR and exported and enforced by the Red Army and the Soviet Secret Police.³⁴ It cannot just be assumed that the other countries of the region were merely objects of the activity of outside forces, devoid of any political subjectivity of their own and deprived of their own specific paths of historical development. Among other factors, it was the specific experiences of the Eastern parts of Europe during the Second World War that prepared the soil for the dominance of left-wing political forces.³⁵

Conditions all over Europe after the war generated gave rise to calls for radical reform, and the Communist Party had strong parliamentary representation in all countries, including France and Italy. Nevertheless, it was the East that experienced the massive death tolls, the trauma of violence and forced labour, the large-scale destruction of buildings, infrastructure, and communications, and mass displacements and homelessness as a result of the German occupation and later pillaging by the Red Army. This part of Europe was left with a substantial labour-force shortage and an exhausted and undernourished population. The shortage of skilled and educated elites was even more pressing due to the massacre of the Jewish population, in the Czech context further exacerbated by the closure of universities for six years. National incomes in Eastern European countries plummeted and consequently the effects of the war were even more devastating, making the desire and the need for change much more intense.³⁶

Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia, 1956–1967 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 1.

³⁴ Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 2004.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2. The war was a multifaceted conflict that beyond the battlefield involved guerrilla resistance fighting, civil wars, and local wars over the future political power. It was largely due to different policies that the Nazi German adopted in Eastern part of Europe that the course of these wars was “unequivocally more murderous, destructive and brutal” on this half of the European continent than on its western one. *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁶ The figures given in different sources vary significantly and are all based on estimates. Nonetheless, according to these estimates, the UK lost about 1% of its

Abrams, however, also highlighted the fact that despite the undeniable war damages, German economic intervention in Eastern Europe, at least in the early years of the war, helped it to prosper industrially. Mining and heavy industry in particular grew considerably, and this was accompanied by an expansion of the working class. As a result, along with the increasing participation of women in paid labour, there was a rise in prosperity, but also, particularly in the Czech case, a stronger awareness of working-class needs and working-class power.³⁷ In addition, the loss of life during the First World War and the skyrocketing birth rates of the 1920s meant that by the late 1940s in most countries in the region a large share of the population was in their late teens and early twenties.³⁸ Besides the traditionally more radical and

population and France less than 1.5%, while Poland nearly one-fifth (6 million), Hungary 4.4% (436 000) and Czechoslovakia 3.7% (i.e. 380 000 people, excluding ethnic Germans). In all about 9 million people (10%) in the Eastern European region lost their lives, an even higher share than in Germany (5.6 million, i.e. 7% of the population). The loss of 3.75 million Eastern European Jews significantly damaged the bourgeoisie as a class in this region. Jews represented about one-half of all people working in the Romanian inter-war banking and commercial sectors and nearly two-thirds in the respective Polish sectors; more than one-half of all Polish doctors and one-third of lawyers were Jewish, as were more than one-half of Hungarian doctors and lawyers. In addition, between 1944 and 1950, an estimated 31 135 000 people from Eastern Europe, or approximately one-third of the entire pre-war population, fled or were resettled, including the 6.3 million Germans who had to leave Poland and Czechoslovakia after the war. See B. F. Abrams (2004), 15–18. These figures were taken from Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East-Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe, Vol. 1 - A History of East Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993). For the death toll figures from the Second World War, see also John Keegan, ed., *The Times Atlas of the Second World War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

³⁷ Czech coal production rose by one-third and electricity by nearly one-half just between 1939 and 1943, while in 1941 real wages increased by 3 percent, despite war inflation. During the war, industrial employment increased by one-quarter. Similar developments were even more extensive in the less industrialised Slovakia, where industrial production was over 60% higher in 1943 than it had been in 1937, and the production of producers' goods almost doubled, and employment in this sector increased by 60 percent during the respective period. See B. F. Abrams (2004), 30–31, in reference to Derek H. Aldcroft and Steven Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe since 1918* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995); Vojtech Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule: The Failure of National Resistance, 1939–42* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). Abrams also refers to Václav Černý, who noted in his memoirs that “the Germans did not want to provoke the workers, but to win them over”. In *Ibid.*, 45; quoted and translated from Václav Černý, *Paměti. Křik Koruny české: 1938–1945. náš kulturní odboj za války* [Memoirs. The Cry of the Czech Crown: 1938–1945. Our Cultural Resistance during the War], (Brno: Atlantis, 1992), 159.

³⁸ Due to the post-First World War baby boom and decreasing mortality rates the populations of Czechoslovakia and Hungary rose by between 8% and 10% and those of Poland, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia by more than 12% during the 1920s.

politically engaged nature of youths, this generation would have carried the memories of the Great Depression and the experience of fighting fascism with them into the post-war period.³⁹ Members of this generation were involved in anti-fascist resistance movements that were often linked to the communists, and they lived through the liberation by the Red Army, which inevitably strengthened sympathies for the Soviet regime. In other words, suspicions of the capitalist and democratic systems and the desire for radical change were to be expected, and the mass participation of youth in various communist-linked youth organisations was just one of the most apparent manifestations of support for left-wing politics.

The traditionally high social status of Czech intellectuals and their active engagement in the social and political history of the country has been widely discussed, and therefore this topic will receive just limited attention here.⁴⁰ Existing studies on this topic focus largely on the intelligentsia's role in the 19th-century National Revival and in the

According to the census of 1947, 17% of the Czechoslovak population was in the 15–25 age group and almost one-quarter of them were aged 15–30. A Hungarian census of the same year revealed similar data, and the situation was similar even in countries much more devastated by the war: 17% of the Polish population was aged 20–30 in 1950 and 20% of Yugoslavs were aged 20–30 in 1948. See B. F. Abrams (2004), 30–33. These figures were taken from Dudley Kirk, *Europe's Population in the Interwar Years* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1946); and the Statistical Office of the United Nations, *Demographic Yearbook*, Vols. 1,4,8,9 and 11 (New York: United Nations, 1948, 1952, 1956, 1957, 1959).

³⁹ It should be noted that the Great Depression had a distinct impact on Czechoslovakia. Even though, unlike in other countries of the region, it helped cause an escalation of ethnic tensions and radicalised Konrad Henlein's Party in the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia escaped an effect of the economic crisis felt in other countries of the region – German dominance of foreign trade. While Germany controlled much of the foreign trade in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, it was only responsible for 15% of imports and exports in Czechoslovakia in 1937 and Germany's share in total foreign investment was just 7.2%, i.e. less than one-quarter of what Britain's share was. Also, due to the advanced industrialisation of the country, the depression did not lead to severe indebtedness among the peasant population. In B. F. Abrams (2004), 37.

⁴⁰ In the Czech context the categories of 'intellectuals' or 'intelligentsia' include not just literary figures and academics but a much wider range of persons who stood at the borderline between culture and politics in both the official and alternative spheres. They would include variety of people involved in cultural institutions and arts (i.e. film, theatre, and music), religious leaders but also professional lawyers or doctors. On the complexity of defining this social group, particularly in the specific socio-cultural environment of the region, see B. F. Abrams (2004), 39 and Fiona Björling, "Who Is the We of the Intelligentsia in Central and Eastern Europe?" in *Intelligentsia in the Interim. Recent Experiences from Central and Eastern Europe*. *Slavica Lundensia* 14, ed. Fiona Björling (Lund: Lund University, 1995).

establishment of the independent state, in other words, they tend to examine the issue of Czech intellectuals predominantly, though not exclusively, in relation to the issues of national identity and nationalism.⁴¹ It must also be noted that in the First Republic under President Masaryk, intellectuals were not just figures of popular authority, but also had close ties to those in the highest political circles. Owing to the strong left-wing inclinations shared by members of this powerful social group, as well as their anti-Nazi attitudes, even before the war, and given the fact that the Czech intelligentsia were a key force in inhibiting the Nazi plan to assimilate the relatively passive Czech population, leading figures of the educated elite became prime targets of Nazi repression during the Protectorate, while the working class remained largely an object of pacification and, in a sense, economic corruption. Nazi persecutions escalated after the Heydrich assassination in May 1942, from which point the Germans succeeded in breaking most of the local resistance, especially that led by the intelligentsia.⁴²

To put it in Václav Černý's words, during the war the intelligentsia "suffered the most ... [and] also showed the most character and faithfulness of all the groups in our society". It thus "acquired a moral legitimacy like no other strata" and was expected to bear the burden

⁴¹ Carol Skalník Leff, *The Czech and Slovak Republics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Péter László and Robert B. Pynsent, eds., *Intellectuals and the Future in the Habsburg Monarchy 1890–1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Pr., 1988); Robert B. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (London, Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 1994); Kieran Williams, "National Myths in the New Czech Liberalism," in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpplin eds., *Myths and Nationhood* (London: Routledge, 1997), 132–140. Examples of studies on the socialist and post-socialist periods include Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); "National Myths in the New Czech Liberalism," in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schoepflin (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Aviezer Tucker, "The Politics of Conviction: The Rise and Fall of Czech Intellectual-Politicians," in Andras Bozoki, ed., *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 1999), and Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2003).

⁴² For a more detailed discussion of the issues of Czechs under the Nazi regime see B. F. Abrams (2004), 45–47 in reference to Detlef Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter deutschem Protektorat. Teil II. Besatzungspolitik, Kollaboration und Widerstand im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren von Heydrichs Tod bis zum Prager Aufstand (1942–1945)* (Munich/Vienna: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1975) and Vojtech Mastny, *Czechs under Nazi Rule: The Failure of National Resistance, 1939–42* (New York: Columbia University Press. East Central European Studies, 1971).

of responsibility for the country's development in the post-war era.⁴³ Intellectuals came under strong pressure to choose sides between the left and the right, and the strongest pressure came from the communists.⁴⁴ Abrams has summarised the key arguments that the Communist Party, and its members and sympathisers, used to draw intellectuals into their camp, arguments made by Communists in Parliament and in the media. The Communist Party emphasised the traditional leading role that intellectuals had played in the nation's history, including the war years, which meant that it would be impossible for them to stand aside from 'new' developments.

Part of the communist propaganda were also made frequent references to the low-class origins of the intelligentsia and thus their ties to the 'common people', while also celebrating the appeal of socialism, which would allegedly liberate the creative class from the vagaries and exploitation of the market. Support for the communist cause was also generated at the highest levels of cultural management, including the Ministry of Culture and Education and the Ministry of Information, both of which were run by communists after the war and offered attractive posts to members of intelligentsia as a form of corruption. Finally, there were also threats and warnings of replacements and exclusion, which were indicative of the communists' methods of dealing with anyone who ignored or opposed their agenda. Opponents of communists in Roman Catholic and democratic-socialist circles were already prior to 1948 warning the Czech intelligentsia that it had 'exchanged its ideals for ideology'. A leading anti-communist journalist and writer, Ferdinand Peroutka, stressed that intellectuals were not supposed to avoid political engagement altogether but rather to "refuse to subordinate themselves to utilitarian political primitivism, merely carrying out the tasks given them by political secretariat".⁴⁵

The communists' growing power in the country after the end of the war gained further support from the international context. The Košice

⁴³ V. Černý (1992), 396–97, quoted in B. F. Abrams (2004), 47.

⁴⁴ Abrams distinguishes four major groups of post-war Czech intellectuals: communist, democratic-socialist, Roman Catholic, and Protestant intellectuals. The leading figures of these groups lead the post-war debates in periodicals which constituted public discourse on key political, cultural, and social matters. See B. F. Abrams (2004), 53–88.

⁴⁵ Quoted from Pavel Tigrid, "Výzva k velikosti," [A Call to Greatness], *Lidová demokracie* (3 November 1946): 2, and Ferdinand Peroutka, "Člověk je víc než politik," [A Human is more than a Politician] *Dnešek* 1 (1946/47): 427. In B. F. Abrams (2004), 50–51.

Programme was adopted a few weeks before the end of the war and it explicitly declared the “infinite gratitude of the Czech and Slovak nation to the Soviet Union” and stated that the new government would “consider the closest alliance with the victorious Slavic superpower in the East to be a dauntless leading line of Czechoslovak foreign politics”.⁴⁶ The USSR had undeniable triumphs, Stalin was successful in the negotiations over the post-war division of Europe at the Yalta conference in February of 1945, and the Soviets supported the deportation of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia. There was also a degree of public disappointment with the First Republic, which was blamed for inadequately handling social problems and for relying on Western allies who ultimately betrayed the country at Munich. All these factors helped to enhance the position of the Communist Party, whose membership grew rapidly during the first post-war years.⁴⁷

The cultural scene and particularly the print media played a major part in the fight over the nation's future. Again, the Košice Programme stated that “the new times and the new ideological position of Czechoslovakia requires ideological revision of her cultural programme” and that the post-war government was planning to “accomplish rigorous democratisation”, to facilitate “access to schools and other resources of education and culture for the widest strata of population”, and most of all to open up “the very system of education and nature of culture so that it would not just serve a narrow group of

⁴⁶ *Program československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků, přijatý na prvé schůzi vlády dne 5. dubna 1945 v Košicích* [The Programme of the Czechoslovak Government of the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks Adopted at the First Government's Meeting on the 5th April 1945 in v Košice], (Prague: Ministerstvo informací, 1945). An online version is also available at http://www.svedomi.cz/dokdoby/1945_kosvlpr.htm.

⁴⁷ Communist Party membership grew from 28 485 to 800 000 just in the course of 1945, and by the end of 1947 reached 1 266 140 in the Czech lands alone. In the elections of 1946, the Party gained 40% of the vote in the Czech lands and even though it was defeated in Slovakia by the Democratic Party (30%:62%), it reached 38% in total in the entire country. The figures are taken from B. F. Abrams (2004), 57, in reference to Jan Kašpar, “Členská základna komunistické strany Československa v letech 1945–1949,” *Československý časopis historický* 19 (1971), 1–25. For the results of the general election in 1946 in the Czech lands, see B. F. Abrams (2004), 58. For an informative overview of the 1946 election and its aftermath, see also “Volby 1946,” [The Elections of 1946] in <http://www.totalita.cz/> (accessed 20 February 2009); in this source it is also noted that the election results were published in the daily *Rudé právo* on 28 May 1948, but no yearbook released during the communists' rule ever referred to the absolute figures on the election returns, always just the percentage was cited.

people but the public and the nation". The document concluded with the promise not to allow the "depredatory interests of parasiting individuals and groups" to take precedence over the "interests of the nation".⁴⁸ The key words of 'access', 'common interest' and 'service' were already pointing towards the future direction of socio-cultural development. Left-wing intellectuals and journalists enjoyed not just support from government declarations but also access to a wide range of periodicals in which their views were made apparent. Such periodicals included the communist daily *Rudé právo* (Red Right), which had the largest circulation in the country (half a million copies), and the theoretical and cultural weeklies *Tvorba* (Creation) and *Kulturní politika* (Cultural Politics). *Tvorba* was a propaganda vehicle of the Central Committee of the Party published by Svoboda, the Party's publishing house. In the 1945–1957 period especially it was known for its strict promotion of the Stalinist notion of culture as a tool of political struggle and for its ruthless campaigns against non-communist periodicals and the intellectuals associated with them.⁴⁹

Pavel Janáček has referred to the three years leading up to February 1948 as the period of "suppressing the margins and promoting the centre", and even though the explicitly pro-communist ideology still lacked full public support and the appropriate political space, this short period sufficed to allow centralisation tendencies to grow and thrive.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ In *Program československé vlády...* (1945).

⁴⁹ *Tvorba's* leading contributors (Ladislav Štoll, Jiří Hájek, Jiří Taufer) carried on endless attacks on and disputes with Social Democratic intellectuals and literati (Ferdinand Peroutka, Václav Černý) and on periodicals such as *Dnešek*, *Kritický měsíčník*, *Obzory*, *Svobodné slovo*, and they questioned the ideological and aesthetic value of the work by authors close to Catholic literary circles (Jaroslav Durych, Zdeněk Kalista) while accusing them of collaboration with the Nazi regime. In addition, communist intellectuals were contributing to periodicals published by the then already powerful Revolutionary Trade Union, such as *Práce* [Labour], and to the Social Democratic press, like the daily *Právo lidu* [People's Right], and the cultural and political periodicals *Směr* [The Direction] and *Cíl* [The Goal]. For a discussion of the left-oriented press and its opponents see B. F. Abrams (2004), 59–61, in reference to Karel František Zieris, *Nové základy českého periodického tisku* (Prague: Orbis, 1947). See also the entries "Kritický měsíčník", "Tvorba" and "Kulturní politika" in *Slovník českých spisovatelů po roce 1945* [The Dictionary of Czech Writers after 1945], <http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/index.jsp> (accessed 20 February 2009).

⁵⁰ Pavel Janáček, "Potlačování okraje, prosazování středu. Operace vyloučení jako součást programu ideální literatury 1945–48" [Suppressing the Margins and Promoting the Centre: an Attempt at an Ideal Literature], in *Populární literatura v české a slovenské kultuře po roce 1945. Sborník referátů z literárněvědné konference 40. Bezručovy Opavy (16. - 18. 9. 1996)* [Popular Literature in Czech and Slovak Culture after 1945

In general terms, Czech publishing companies came out of the war in reasonably good shape. The publishing boom in the war years, the immense symbolic capital of the 'Czech book' accumulated during the German occupation, and the fact that most of the publishers avoided direct collaboration with the Nazi regime, all this paved the way for their post-war development. One major publisher from the inter-war period, Ladislav Kuncíř, noted that "following the glorious May '45, cultural life flourished [and] joy gave strength to all business", but such an atmosphere also allowed a fear of competition to grow.⁵¹ Unlike, for example, the areas of film production or theatre, the well-established network of private publishers was not nationalised immediately in 1945, and was instead left to create its own system, combining a certain level of regulated production, voluntary self-control by individual publishers, and state interventions.⁵²

A part of the emerging regulatory tendencies was a general inclination to support publishing companies affiliated with social or political organisations (publishing companies such as Melantrich, Orbis, Mladá fronta, Práce, Svoboda) to the detriment of the more traditional private companies (Václav Petr, Jan Laichter, Fr. Borový). Professional associations themselves actively contributed to the installation of the regulatory system. By May 1945 the Svaz českých knihkupců a nakladatelů (Union of Czech Booksellers and Publishers) had issued a ten-point programme with a list of largely repressive steps, including the key requirement of setting up a central professional committee, the main aim of which would be to plan and control publishing activities in the country. The powerful trend towards centralisation that dominated most areas of the nation's post-war production encouraged the revival of pre-war professional associations in publishing (Kmen), distribution (Obchodní družstvo českých knihkupců – Commercial Cooperative of Czech Booksellers) and financing (Záložna knihkupců a nakladatelů - Savings Bank of Booksellers and Publishers).

Proceeding from a Literary Conference – the 40th 'Bezruč's Opava'], ed. Richard Svoboda, (Prague – Opava, ÚČL AVČR, Slezská universita, 1998); Pavel Janáček, *Literární brak: operace vyloučení, operace nahrazení, 1938–1951* [Literary Trash: Operation of Exclusion, Operation of Replacement], (Brno: Host, 2004).

⁵¹ See L. Kuncíř (1985), 155.

⁵² "Nakladatelství," in Pavel Janoušek et al., eds., *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989. Díl 1 (1945–48)* [History of Czech Literature 1945–1989, Vol. 1, 1945–48], (Prague: Academia, 2008), 61–73.

New organisations emerged too, such as the Blok kolektivních nakladatelů (Block of Collective Publishers), which assembled a number of powerful publishers established after the war, some of them from confiscated German publishing houses (Mladá fronta, Práce, Nová osvěta, Svoboda). These houses supported the idea and practice of increasing state intervention in book production (i.e. more rigorous approval procedures). The strongest ones also began to set up their own bookstore chains. In the – apparently politically short-sighted – view of the majority of Czech publishers (though contrary to the majority of Slovak ones), regulation of the book market was intended to limit competition and thus guarantee sales and, potentially, stable profits. Paradoxically, the regulatory leanings of the publishers, led by the *Blok* members within the *Svaz*, matched the interests of the communist-run Ministry of Information. However, its interests were of a very different nature and were focused primarily on political control over printed matter.⁵³

It was the Ministry of Information, headed by the communist Václav Kopecký, and its Publishing Division, run by the respected poet František Halas – who also served as the chairman of the re-established writers association, the Syndikát českých spisovatelů (Syndicate of Czech Writers) – that managed book production at the state level. The Publishing Division essentially adopted the authorisation methods that were developed at Ministerstvo lidové osvěty (Ministry for the Education of the People) during the war and even took some of its staff members, those able to prove that they had supported pro-national affairs during the war. As early as 4 June 1945 the post-war Ministry of Information issued its first statement about the ‘temporary’ regulation of the book market; regulation already applied to all the major principles of planned publishing and paper allocation, justified by the claim that there was a need to “replace all the hundreds of thousands of books destroyed during the (German) occupation”.⁵⁴ In addition, even then the Ministry required that individual publishers submit their editorial plans to its Publishing Division for review at least half a year before the expected release date. Serious attempts were also made to regulate translations, which had traditionally been one of the strongest areas

⁵³ “Regulace knižního trhu,” [Regulation of the Book Market], in P. Janoušek (Vol. 1, 2008), 33–36.

⁵⁴ Quoted in P. Janáček (2004), 152. Published in *Knihkupec a nakladatel* 7/11 (July 1945), 1–2.

of domestic book publishing, justified by the need to stop 'wasting foreign currency' on international copyright fees.

Even before 1948 regulation of the book market had been driven by a specific notion of the commonly shared value assigned to 'ideal literature', that is, to certain 'high quality' texts drawn largely from the national literary canon, and these literary values were to replace the individualistic commercial values that had supposedly dominated the pre-war book scene. It is impossible not to notice how well Bonch-Bruевич's project to monopolise the 19th-century Russian literary legacy through massive print runs of classic writers resonated in Czechoslovakia, too. In addition, from the perspective of ideal literature, the reputation of an author's name alone was no longer considered to be a guarantee of such 'quality', which instead had to be instituted and then asserted by a separate authority. As Halas put it, "we are prepared not to issue publishing authorisation for any classic author, whether of domestic or foreign origin, unless someone is willing to back up the edition or translation".⁵⁵ These in fact patronising and authoritarian attitudes towards actual publishing practices, which were clearly derived from a position of power, significantly co-shaped the institutional system of book production in the first years after the war.

The Státní publikační komise (State Publishing Committee) was set up as a specific advisory body to the Ministry, and included writers, publishers and members of other state and social organisations. It oversaw the editorial plans of individual publishers and one of its tasks was to draw up a bill to create a proper legal basis for the regulation of book production.⁵⁶ Since that law was not pushed through until after the communist coup, until February 1948 paper, defined as a 'strategic raw material', was used as a tool to manipulate book production on the basis of allocation decisions. Paper restrictions were largely a substitute argument, as there was no real paper shortage in post-war Czechoslovakia. It is worth noting that the capacity of Czechoslovak paper production industries, originally set up to supply the entire Austro-Hungarian monarchy, had always exceeded the actual needs of the country, so a significant amount of domestic paper production was being exported already before the war. The industry was nationalised

⁵⁵ P. Janáček (2004), 163.

⁵⁶ See Jiří Knapík, "Kulturní politika: její organizace a lidé kolem ní," [Cultural Politics: Its Organisation and the People around It], in J. Knapík (2002), 15–32; P. Janáček (2004).

right after the war in conformity with the Beneš decrees issued in the autumn of 1945, and despite some difficulties replacing the skilled staff, as the industry predominantly located in the borderland regions had previously been staffed mainly by Germans, it managed to supply the market with enough paper until at least the end of 1946.⁵⁷

The Ministry's Publishing Division co-operated with a variety of professional bodies and its interventions into publishing were driven by an increasingly instructive policy of promoting 'high-quality' and 'sophisticated' titles. The parliamentary debates on book-related matters clearly reflected the prevailing discourse on ideas about the future of the book. Already in January 1947, one deputy argued: "today there are no longer any doubts about the fact that planning of publishing is a cultural necessity".⁵⁸ He referred to a statement in May 1945 from the Union of Booksellers and Publishers and cited their demands to establish "a specialised institution devoted to the planning and control of book production ... whose task would be to explore the cultural needs of all people, encourage good reading ... co-ordinate

⁵⁷ The majority of companies were located in the borderland and only 5% of its employees were Czechs. As a result, the nationalised companies were faced with the task of having to replace nearly two-thirds of their German skilled workers, who were deported as part of the expulsion of Germans after the Second World War. A significant number of companies was nationalised following the introduction of the President of the Republic's decree (No. 100/1945), when twenty larger (i.e. over 300 employees) companies were transformed into the six national ones. After the second wave of nationalisation another 12 national companies were set up. See "100/1945 Sb. - Dekret presidenta republiky ze dne 24. října 1945 o znárodnění dolů a některých průmyslových podniků." [Decree of the President of the Republic of 24 October 1945 Concerning Nationalisation of Mines and Some Industrial Companies]; an online version is available at: http://cs.wikisource.org/wiki/Dekret_presidenta_o_zn%C3%A1rodn%C4%9Bn%C3%AD_dol%C5%AF_a_n%C4%9Bkter%C3%BDch_pr%C5%AFmyslov%C3%BDch_podnik%C5%AF (accessed 20 April 2009). For the history of the paper industry, see *Český papírenský průmysl v období 1945–1988* [The Czech Paper Industry 1945–1988], (Prague: Nakl. techn. Lit, 1990–1991). For a brief overview, see Miloslav Milichovský, "Historie celulózo-papírenské výroby v českých zemích v poválečných letech," [The History of Cellulose and Paper Production in the Czech Lands in the Post-war Years], http://www.papirnik.cz/sppc/sppc_konference_pbice_1.htm (accessed 24 April 2009).

⁵⁸ From the speech of Deputy Krajcir delivered at the 33rd meeting of the Czechoslovak Parliament on Wednesday, 29 January 1947. See "Správa výborov kulturneho, priemyselného a informacného o vladnom návrhu zákona (tlac 110) o povinných výtlačkoch (tlac 228)" [Report of the Cultural, Industrial and Information Committee on the Bill on Statutory Copies], in Spoločná česko-slovenská digitálna parlamentná knižnica. Dokumenty českého a slovenského parlamentu [Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library. Documents of Czech and Slovak Parliament], at <http://www.psp.cz/cgi-bin/eng/eknih/1946uns/stenprot/033schuz/s033003.htm> (accessed 20 April 2009).

publishing projects, exclude redundant competitive editions, suppress literary trash and most of all to serve spiritual freedom and the true people's democracy". He was defending the achievements of Kopecký's Ministry of Information, which – he argued – suffered from a lack of appropriate resources, including staff and office space, preventing them from conducting the consistent research on the book market that was required for proper planning of production. He noted that, despite these shortcomings the division managed to regulate the allocation of paper and printing capacities on the basis of "cultural needs". The "key criteria of the publications division's decision making", he argued further, "was to bring a positive and economically useful plan that would guarantee book production of the highest quality".

Although the Publishing Division was often accused of being far too tolerant, in fact it rejected almost 17% of the titles submitted to it in 1946 alone.⁵⁹ Banning certain titles outright was not the only way of preventing them from reaching the public. A system of paper allocation was already in place, and over time other forms of intervention in the editorial policy of individual publishers became more and more frequent.⁶⁰ It was common to postpone the release date or impose limits on the print run; the state had the authority put limits on the booksellers' rebate or to enforce a decree requesting thirty free copies of each title from the publishers. By the end of 1946, paper actually had become a powerful tool of control because real shortages began to occur as nationalised paper plants were forced to export massive amounts of paper. The final, open conflict between the state on the one hand and private publishers and booksellers occurred in January 1948, when the Communist Minister Kopecký (paradoxically) accused them of "building a totalitarian system" and "limiting the reader's freedom by blocking him from progressive literature and determining what he could buy".⁶¹

⁵⁹ "Regulace knižního trhu," in P. Janoušek (Vol. 1, 2008), 35.

⁶⁰ Jaroslav Císař, "Knižní obor v českých zemích po 2. světové valce," [The Book Field in the Czech Lands after the Second World War], Svaz českých knihkupců a nakladatelů, <http://www.sckn.cz> (accessed April 20 2005).

⁶¹ Kopecký's attacking statement was released by the Czech Press Agency (ČTK) on 24 January 1948 and reprinted in *Naše doba, revue pro vědu, umění a život sociální* (1894–1949), a periodical published by a renowned publisher of literary, academic and scholarly texts, and a long-term president of the Union of Publishers and Booksellers Jan Laichter. Quoted in Jakub Šofar, "Pocta Laichterovu nakladatelství," [A Tribute to Laichter's Publishing House], in <http://www.novinky.cz/kultura/136334-liternetur-pocta-laichterovu-nakladatelstvi.html> (accessed 25 April, 2009). Kopecký's attack on booksellers is also discussed in "Nakladatelství," in P. Janoušek (Vol. 1, 2008), 65–66.

In other words, the specific institutional structure and the powerful public discourse of control and regulation were already in place before 1948 and were, so to speak, ready-made for the communists to take over once they came to power. Like the post-1989 transitional processes, the pro-communist ‘transformation’ after 1948 was, at least when it came to book production, not just about a radical and revolutionary turnover, but also, if not most of all, about the gradual *continuation* of some pre-established practices. It was the pre-1948 period that allowed participants in the local book business to gradually come to terms with the idea that not just the national but most importantly the *nationalised* book world simply could not be left in the hands of incompetent readers and uncontrolled profit-seeking publishers. The argument about the need to protect a ‘small national culture’ was closely associated with the idea that certain texts simply have no place in its post-war reconstruction. A part of this ‘protective’ argument was the even more powerful idea that it is possible, if not actually necessary, for the authorities *outside* the institutional system of book production and reception to make decisions about which texts to include in (and exclude from) the concept of ‘national culture’.

The first major book-related step the communist government took after the coup in February 1948 was to nationalise the printing industry by introducing the Nationalisation Act (Act no. 123/1948 Coll.) on 5 May 1948, retroactively effective from 1 January 1948, and still signed by President Beneš, Prime Minister Gottwald, and Minister of Information Kopecký.⁶² It declared that retroactively as of 1 January “all companies that reproduce printed matter in any mechanical or chemical way, including any type foundries and any other related enterprises” are to be socialised. Article 4 then clearly stated: “the right to establish and manage new companies regardless of their size ... is being reserved to the state”. Nationalisation applied to all the property of the respective businesses – their estates, buildings, equipment, equities, bank accounts and liquid assets. According to Article 13, anyone who tried to cause ‘intrigue’ in an effort “to thwart nationalisation or make it in any way difficult” would be tried as criminals and receive a heavy jail sentence and be fined up to five million Czechoslovak Crowns.

⁶² Act No. 123/1948 Coll., “Zákon ze dne 5. května o znárodnění polygrafických podniků,” [Act of 5 May on the Nationalisation of Printing Companies]. Available in pdf format at: <http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/archiv2008/sbirka/1948/sb47-48.pdf>.

In the debate in the parliamentary session during which the bill was passed, one of the deputies summarised the arguments justifying nationalisation of the printing industry, which was to “create conditions for making literature accessible to the widest people’s strata, for publishing good-quality books ... for a price acceptable to the working class people”.⁶³ He stressed that “in peaceful times of building up the country”, books would be “as important as a gun in war”, for “our people are longing for education, their love for the book is well known, and therefore it is absolutely necessary to remove profit from culture”. He also stated, somewhat blankly, that removing private and capitalist profit from the printing industry was by no means just “an economic act but mainly a cultural and political one”. Only once the printing industry was in the hands of the nation, in order to serve the nation, he stressed, would “the true freedom of the press” be guaranteed. There is no freedom of the press as long as the printing industry remains in the hands of the capitalists, as long as an unfree private press is in control of public opinion. The nationalised printing industry was thus seen as a crucial strategic tool, a “valuable supplementary part of the overall process of nationalisation, and a useful helper in building up the country”, and the direct links between collective ownership, freedom and democracy were underscored: “the nationalisation of the printing industry is a major democratic contribution to the freedom in our state.”

So even as early as May 1948 emphasis was being placed on the often disregarded fact that “by nationalising printing companies the people will gain control over publishing, which is not being nationalised, for it is self-evident that without printing offices as a technological precondition for book publishing, no book will be published that would not represent a true contribution for the development of our culture”. In other words, this bill was the first and a very important step towards instituting controlled access to printed matter.⁶⁴ After the

⁶³ All the quotes are from a speech by Deputy Juha made at the 110th meeting of the Czechoslovak Parliament on 5 May 1948. See “*Tesnopisecka zprava o 110. schuzi Ustavodarného Narodního shromazdení republiky Československé v Praze ve středu dne 5. května 1948*,” [A Shorthand Record of the 110th Meeting of the Constitutional National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic in Prague, Wednesday 5 May 1948], which can be obtained from *Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library/Ustavodarne Narodni shromazdeni republiky Československé 1946–1948, Stenoprotokoly*, <http://www.psp.cz/cgi-bin/eng/eknih/1946uns/stenprot/110schuz/s110003.htm>.

⁶⁴ One of the managers of the nationalised polygraphy industry was Adolf Burger (born 1917), a Jewish-Slovak typographer who, while a prisoner in a concentration

February coup, an essentially three-level system of central cultural management was instituted: the level of party policy, the state level and the level of professional unions. At the party level, the Kulturní a propagační oddělení sekretariátu ÚV KSČ (Department of Culture and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), a key organ for enforcing the cultural policy of the Communist Party, had to transform itself from a rather narrowly defined party institution into a major vehicle of nationwide monopolisation of power. Between 1946 and 1949 alone the size of the department grew from 44 to 67 members. Its responsibilities included coming up with new structures of control to introduce into the existing cultural and educational institutions (and into new textbooks), overseeing youth and sports organisations, promoting the publication of Marxist literature, and purging certain people from the press and from the staff of hobby and cultural associations.⁶⁵

In the autumn of the same year the Lektorská rada (Editorial Board) of the Party's culture and propaganda department assumed most of the control over every area of publishing, including the production of literary, popular and academic texts. Publication of over 250 titles-in-progress was halted in 1948, and all the editorial plans for 1949

camp, was involved in the legendary 'Operation Bernhard'. His story only recently gained wider international attention following the release of the film *Die Fälscher* (2007, German/Austrian co-production) directed by Stefan Ruzowitzky, which won the 2008 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It is based on Burger's memoir and refers to the largest counterfeiting operation in the history of the Second World War. In 1942–1945 in a specially equipped workshop set up in Sachsenhausen and other camps and staffed by prisoners - mostly former professional typographers - the Germans managed to print banknotes with a total value of over £ 134 million. Burger, a member of the Communist Party since 1933, was imprisoned owing to his involvement in the resistance movement, mainly for falsifying baptismal certificates that allowed Jews to escape deportation. After occupying this prestigious job in the typography industry after it was nationalised - a process that extinguished all private printers - Burger was removed from his post in 1952 during the Communist purges of 'disloyal' Party members, mainly Jews accused of a Titoite-Zionist conspiracy. For seven years he worked in a factory producing hydraulic dredgers. Later he was appointed to head a Prague state taxi company and after that to run the Prague municipal services - the street-sweepers. See Sylva and Oskar Krejčí, *Číslo 64401 mluví* [Number 64401 Speaks Out] (Prague: Gustav Petrů, 1945); Adolf Burger, *Dáblůva dílna - Největší padělatelská operace všech dob* [The Devil's Workshop - the Biggest Counterfeiting Operation of All Time], (Prague: Ikar, 2007); in English translation: Adolf Burger, *The Devil's Workshop: A Memoir of the Nazi Counterfeiting Operation* (London: Frontline Books, 2009).

⁶⁵ Jiří Knapík, "Kulturní politika: její organizace a lidé kolem ní," [Cultural Politics: Its Organisation and the People around It], in J. Knapík (2002), 15–32.

underwent revision.⁶⁶ As of the end of 1948 every publishing house was required to submit a *lektorský posudek* (an expert's report) as part of an application for approval to publish a title.⁶⁷ Despite the deputy's assurance that nationalisation of the printing industry would suffice to guarantee the free production of 'valuable books', Act No. 94/1949 on the Publishing, and Distribution of Books, Sheets of Music and other Non-periodical Publications of 24 March 1949 was then issued on 10 April 1949.⁶⁸ This law, issued a year after the communist coup, clearly delineated the end of private and independent publishing, and established a fully centralised institutional framework that would remain essentially in place for the next forty years. From now on, book production was regulated, or more precisely 'commissioned', by entities positioned *outside* the actual relationship between the reader and the book, entities that, however, had the legitimacy to represent and determine the interests of 'common readers'.

To illustrate the scale of this operation, it is worth noting that after the relative publishing boom of the war years, the post-war Union of Booksellers and Publishers still listed over 1100 members in 1946 and 1430 in 1 December 1948, but once the March 1949 bill was introduced 370 publishers went into liquidation and another 120 lost their license.⁶⁹ All titles-in-progress had to be registered at the Ministry, and the paper, book stocks and archives of the private houses were essentially confiscated. Although some former private publishers and editors managed to get jobs in state bookshops, libraries, or even the editorial offices of the new state publishing houses, it is impossible to sum up the number of personal and family tragedies and the ruined careers – usually followed by the loss of basic social and material security – and the lives destroyed as a result of this change, or to fathom the amount of professional and human capital that was wasted in the larger perspective of the development of Czech post-war society.

⁶⁶ "Literární život – Cenzura," [Literary Life – Censorship], in Pavel Janoušek et al., eds., *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989. Díl 2 (1948–58)* [History of Czech Literature 1945–1989, Vol. 2, 1948–58], (Prague: Academia 2008), 61–68.

⁶⁷ J. Knapík (2002), 15–32.

⁶⁸ See "Zákon za dne 24. března o vydávání a rozšiřování knih, hudebnin a jiných neperiodických publikací," in *Sbírka zákonů, Republiky Československé*, Ročník 1949, Částka 31, 10.4. 1949. Available in pdf format at <http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/archiv2008/sbirka/1949/sb31-49.pdf>.

⁶⁹ See Václav Mikota, *Kulturní dvouletka a knižní trh* [The Cultural Two-year Plan and the Book Market], (Prague: SČKN, 1946); Jan Halada, "Předmluva," [Foreword], in *Encyklopedie českých nakladatelství 1949–2006* [Encyclopaedia of Czech Publishers, 1949–2006], (Prague: Libri, 2007), 7–21; J. Císař (2005).

Among the many stories that could illustrate the impact of this socio-cultural change on the individual professionals, there is that of Ladislav Kuncíř (1890–1974), who is quoted above. His publishing house (founded in 1923) focused on publishing literary and philosophical books and journals (*Rozmach*, *Akord*, *Kuncířovy noviny*) and theological and religious texts, produced with a sophisticated design, print and binding. After the March bill was introduced in 1949 all the assets of his publishing house, including contracted manuscripts, paper and book supplies, were taken over by the state-operated Vyšehrad, but he was at least appointed as its director. In 1951 he was charged with high treason and in a show-trial sentenced to ten years in jail and required to forfeit all his property. His entire personal library and the publishing house's archives, with all the correspondence, contracts, originals of illustrations, and design layouts by local top artists, and so on, were confiscated and then disappeared. He spent the next five years in some of the harshest prisons for political prisoners, such as Valdice and Leopoldov. He was released from prison for health reasons in 1956, but was not allowed to work in any job related to publishing until he received a full rehabilitation in 1966. He noted in his memoirs that "I left home as a poor boy, and now as an old man I am poor too, ... [but] despite all the difficulties, turmoil and incredible losses, all I have ever been concerned with is the well-being of Czech culture".⁷⁰

Despite the concerns of individual professionals involved in book production, it was the state, through the Ministerstvo informací a osvěty (Ministry of Information and Education) that, according to Article No. 2 of the March bill, was to "set up a plan for the publication of non-periodical printed matter and control its release following the proposal of the Central Editorial Board".⁷¹ The law also clearly delineated which *collective* subjects were eligible for a licence to publish non-periodical publications: state organs and companies, political parties represented in the National Assembly, particular union organisations, supreme cultural, economic, social, and sports organisations, and special-interest associations, national and communal enterprises, co-operatives and associations. As the law further indicated, the establishment of any publishing enterprise was conditional upon the special approval of the Ministry. Those subjects that already held a licence were given fifteen days to re-register; other publishing companies,

⁷⁰ See L. Kuncíř (1985), 164.

⁷¹ See "Zákon za dne 24. března..." (1949).

which held publishing concessions on the basis of the trade law, ceased to exist. Moreover, the Ministry reserved the right to request from those whose concessions were to be taken away a signed inventory of all business-related property, including the stock of books and paper, and publishing contracts. The original owners were entitled to compensation, but no more than the acquisition price of all the property involved. Except for cases deemed as a criminal offence, anyone publishing without a license, as defined in the new law, could be fined up to 100 000 Czechoslovak Crowns or be sentenced to six months in jail. Anyone who in any way facilitated or supported unlicensed publishing was also liable to these charges.

Overall, an institutional framework – with both direct and indirect ties to the state – was established, in which the private sector as such was wiped out, and only one, specially designated body was authorised to grant publishing licenses. This *de facto* transformed the very notion of publishing. It was no longer defined as a set of activities leading to the *reproduction and sale* of numerous copies of a text. In practical terms, publishing primarily involved *negotiation* over controlled access to resources, such as printing technologies and the paper supply, and over permission to copy and distribute.

The official texts that were designed to legitimise the early stages of establishing the centralised regulatory institutional structure provide at least some sense of the discourse and the procedural aspects of the process. An example of this discourse is provided by a key speech that Václav Kopecký, delivered before the National Assembly on the day the March bill was passed, tellingly titled, “Books into the Hands of the People!”⁷² In it, he summarised all the principles involved in the planning and regulation of the publishing policy. He started off by referring to the historical roots of such policy and especially to the ‘martyr-writers’, who, even during the time of anti-Nazi resistance, “reflected on the need for a turnaround in publishing activities in what [after the war] was to become a liberated republic”. Here Kopecký failed to note one important aspect of this project. As Janáček convincingly

⁷² “Projev ministra informací a osvěty Václava Kopeckého na schůzi Národního shromáždění 24. března 1949,” [Speech by the Minister of Information and Education Václav Kopecký at a Meeting of the National Assembly on 24 March 1949], in *Knihy do rukou lidu. Zákon o vydávání a rozšiřování knih, hudebnin a jiných neperiodických publikací. Projevy a dokumenty* [Books into the Hands of the People. The Act on Publishing and Distributing Books, Sheet Music, and Other Non-periodical Publications. Speeches and Documents], (Prague: Ministerstvo informací a osvěty, 1949).

showed, a number of the leading figures in the cultural resistance – many of them imprisoned and executed by the Nazis owing to their active involvement in the resistance – did indeed contribute to the development of the notion of ‘ideal literature,’ a notion that became instrumental in the post-war publishing policy. But this programme was meant to liberate mainly fiction writers from the pressures of the market and to adjust local book production to the ‘temporary’ shortage of paper, and at least in its original version it did not involve controlling and limiting freedom of speech or any centrally performed regulation of titles to be released.

Kopecký used these (amended) historical references to frame contemporary developments as though they were the logical continuation of the mostly leftwing authors’ *own* attempts at regulating book production, but he apparently interpreted these attempts according to his own agenda. In other words, it was the actors in the literary and book scene, and not just the authoritarian Communist Party, who were calling for change. He stressed that it was impossible to identify this transformation, which the writers themselves already certainly desired, with the cultural practices applied prior to 1948. Kopecký complained that before the communists were fully in power, “the only regulative and controlling interventions the state authorities were able to pursue were limited to the regulation of paper supply”. Nonetheless, he highlighted the fact that “private printers and reactionary circles” were at that time already constantly attacking even these ‘imperfect’ mechanisms of control. The Minister regretted that “such a valuable amount of paper, so scarce today, had at the time been wasted on publishing valueless, useless and ... dangerous books of foreign Western origin”. So even back in March 1949 he was citing all the key motives that were later to dominate the representation of books and the practices of book production for decades to come. These included a focus on the allocation of and controlled access to resources (both paper and texts), which was to replace the focus on the effectiveness of production and distribution; the elimination of market principles; the definition of a book as a ‘cultural national good’ in need of special ‘protection’; and the perspective of ‘communal needs’ that then began to dominate book production and reception instead of the perspective of individual choice.

In his speech, Kopecký especially stressed the “eternal elimination of private profit-driven interests” from the book scene, with frequent, repeated references to the economic aspects of publishing, condensed into images of niggardly publishers growing rich off the exploitation of

poor authors. In this he reproduced a tradition of discourse in which 'growing rich' was a kind of scarecrow reference to the alleged outcome of anyone's involvement in the (private) book business. The monster of 'wealth' enjoyed a lasting place in communist propaganda. 'Wealth' was constructed socially and in discourse as something undeniably based on exploitation, and anyone potentially suspected of it would be ostracised as a dangerous social deviant. For example, as late as the 1980s, this discursive figure was being reproduced in the media representation of alternative and underground textual production, which was portrayed as a venture largely driven by profit generated from generous 'Western' and 'imperialistic' donations. Kopecký also explained the concept of 'nationalisation', which, he stressed, must not be regarded as the confiscation of private property but as the "radical transformation of the entity licensed for publishing". From that point, this entity would no longer be individual but exclusively 'collective'. Nor does he make any secret of the fact that this collective 'we' should no longer have any doubts about pursuing its own definition of freedom within the power structure surrounding the area of textual communication: "It is simply impossible to define creative freedom in such absurd terms that everything that is written should be published ... it is in *our* interest that creative freedom is most usefully applied to support *our* agenda, the cause of people's democracy, the cause of socialism."⁷³

The re-defining of the publishing entity that actually produces the printed text is of key significance for understanding any system of centrally controlled textual production. In such a system, book production no longer involves an individual and economically grounded relationship between the author, publisher, and reader. These three – inter-related but largely autonomous and independent agencies – are merged to form a unified collective entity driven by 'common interests' inserted from above, and as a result all the specific issues of authority, competence, and above all responsibility, which would otherwise be part of the individual relationships between these entities, become blurred and diffused. What is perhaps even more important – and what I shall try to demonstrate in the coming chapters – is that the entire system loses transparency. The relationships between the particular institutional components of the new system are not clearly defined, so new inter-institutional spaces in which to manoeuvre and manipulate

⁷³ Ibid., 5,6,11. Italics mine.

emerge and become rife with corruption, and there is no accountability in any feedback that may exist. The lack of accountability and transparency is one of the major characteristics of any centrally controlled system, not to mention those with totalitarian ambitions, but the stricter the centralisation, the more likely it is to generate internal, alternative counter-spaces, which significantly contribute to making it more fragile and vulnerable. The piles of pirated copies and their samizdat mutations that historically every regulated book environment has produced – whether in pre-revolutionary France or in Bohemia before the Velvet Revolution – are one of many illustrations of a more general trend of counter-reaction to direct restrictions.

After the March bill of 1949, centralisation of the system of book production was completed with the creation of just thirty six ‘collectively owned’ publishing entities that obtained licenses in order to replace the formerly broad range of private publishers.⁷⁴ These new publishing houses were largely designed to monopolise particular areas of textual production. In order to ensure that the functioning of the new system of book production, which was then essentially exclusively in the hands of a small number of ‘collective subjects’, a complicated system of responsibilities and co-ordination had to be established in order to avoid competition and conflicts of interest. For instance, when a publishing house that focused mainly on translated literature was planning to release a book aimed at teenagers, its editor-in-chief had to seek approval from the publishing house that had been designated as responsible for juvenile literature. Outside the collectively owned houses (Melantrich, Orbis, Mladá fronta, Práce, Svoboda) that already existed, new subjects managed to emerge, either co-operatively or with the direct support of the state, many of them with names like Mír (Peace), Průmyslové nakladatelství (Industrial Publishing House), Rovnost (Equality) or Svět sovětů (The World of the Soviets).

In addition to the institutional constraints and regulations that had essentially developed during the war and immediately afterward, a complex system of editorial boards and approval committees began to be set up already in early 1948 under the supervision of the victorious Party. Direct restriction carried from the ‘class perspective’ in the name

⁷⁴ Even these basic figures vary in different sources. Thus P. Janoušek (Vol. 2, 2008, 70) refers to thirty-six subjects, Bohatcová (1990) to thirty-five subjects, Marie Šedová notes forty of them operating by the mid-1980s, see her *Přehled českých nakladatelství a edic* [Survey of Czech Publishers and Editions], (Brno: Knihovna J. Mahena, 1985).

of the vague and often elastic term of 'socialism' was just one of many tools used in the *ad interim* control of the printed word, which at that time was still the key means of public communication. Other tools included a complex system of interventions executed at the Party, state (i.e. ministerial), and respective professional (unions) levels. The Communist Party also intervened in the personnel policy of the houses by appointing 'politically reliable' individuals to management, and this policy was combined with effective auto-regulatory behaviour of those who chose or were allowed to retain their position in the official institutional framework governing book production. Furthermore, representatives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and particular ministries also had the (often unwritten) authority to personally intervene in the communication process between the text, its producers, and readers.

Following the publishing act of 1949, the Národní ediční rada česká (NERČ - Czech National Editorial Board) was set up under the institutional umbrella of the Ministry of Information, and embraced nearly twenty specialised committees devoted to various areas of publishing (music, history, maps, etc.). It was also responsible for the approval of individual titles as well as book distribution.⁷⁵ The responsibilities of NERČ also then included managing the stock of books accumulated after the liquidation of private publishers and bookstores, nearly 85% of which were destroyed. Similarly, the 'cleansing' of public libraries, which until mid-1949 took place in a more or less spontaneous way, was further formalised by the middle of 1950, and following a specially issued *Seznam nacistické, protistátní, protisovětské a jiné brakové literatury* (The List of Nazi, Anti-state, Anti-Soviet and Other Trash Literature), 'unacceptable' books began to be destroyed, too.⁷⁶ As early as 1948 librarians became involved in developing special instructions how to direct readers towards the carefully pre-selected 'appropriate' texts and how to control their 'correct' reception, propagandistic projects were set up in order to expand the pool of library

⁷⁵ J. Knapík (2002), 15–32.

⁷⁶ Nearly 250 titles were withdrawn from production during the first period of the operation of Lektorská rada's, and around 27.5 million books were removed from the public libraries shelves. Following the establishment of the HSTD another list with 7500 banned titles was issued and was not revised until the early 1960s. See P. Janoušek (Vol. 2, 2008), 64–66 and "Pronásledování tvůrčí inteligence," [Persecutions of the Intelligentsia], Totalita.cz, <http://www.totalita.cz/pik/pti.php> (accessed 20 April 2009).

goers.⁷⁷ Book sales – another frequent target of Kopecký's anti-capitalist attacks – soon followed, too: private booksellers were being gradually integrated into a co-operative institution *Kniha lidu* (The People's Book).

The entire process of centralisation was monitored in professional periodicals. A brief look at one of them can provide an idea of the newly established discourse that reflected the respective changes. One example was *Typographia*, the periodical for printers and typesetters published since 1888, which reacted promptly to the change and in its 1948 volume already published a piece on the operation of the printing industry, written “in the spirit of the new economic order.”⁷⁸ The author of the piece briefly outlined the history of lithography in order to support his argument that the continual advancement of printing technologies contributed to the transition of what used to be a more or less individual arts-and-crafts form of production into a mechanised and industrialised process. The “new planned economic order” then required a “profound, fair and the most objective reorganisation of the printing industry in order to achieve the greatest economising of production through the concentration of the respective enterprises and their further specialisation”. The logic of the argument is again transparent: the liquidation of obsolete and uneconomical enterprises would boost economic results and guarantee an everlasting rise in the living standards of working people. The author also summarised

⁷⁷ One such projects was, for example, the so-called *Tuchlovické hnutí* (Tuchlovice movement), which was supposedly launched spontaneously in the small public library of the town of Tuchlovice at the end of 1948, and as a result of a media campaign soon grew into a nationwide movement supported by the Ministry of Information. The key idea was that high school students and members of the Union of Czech Youth would visit individual households and offer them (pre-selected) books from the library. See Petr Šámal, “Knihovníci v boji o ‘nového člověka’: snahy o řízení četby v literární kultuře 50. let,” [Librarians in the Struggle for a ‘New Man’: Attempts at Controlling Reading in the Literary Culture of the 1950s], *Čtenář* 60 (2008), <http://ctenar.svkkl.cz/clanky/2008-roc-60/0708-2008/knihovnici-v-boji-o-%E2%80%9Enoveho-cloveka%E2%80%9Csnahy-o-rizeni-cetby-v-literarni-kulture-50-let-43-208.htm> (accessed 1 November 2009). See also Petr Šámal, “Pro dobro českého čtenáře. Cenzurní praktiky v literární kultuře padesátých let 20. století,” [For the Good of Czech Readers. Censorship in the Literary Culture of the 1950s] *Dějiny a současnost* 29/6 (2007): 24–27.

⁷⁸ Rudolf Rezníček, “Vývoj československého grafického průmyslu a jeho organizace v duchu nového hospodářského řádu lidově demokratického státu,” [The Development of the Czech Printing Industry and Its Organisation in the Spirit of the New Economic Order of the People's Democratic State], *Typografia: časopis pro technické a společenské otázky knihtiskářů* [Typographia: Journal on the Technical and Social Issues of Printers], (1948): 69.

the achievements of inter-war independent publishing in a somewhat specific way. In his view, an unregulated 'obsolete' system of publishing turned the 'national culture' into an "object of speculation and sub-standard profits". The entire printing industry "should and has to follow its highest interest", that is, to prevent "the national culture as well as the work of the printers" from becoming an "object of exploitation and effortless profits by commercially adept individuals, who could not care less about true cultural values". Therefore, it was essential to "resolve the publishing activities in a fair way by reducing the number of publishers as well as printers who then would be able to secure realistic production as well as the mission of national culture".

The nationalised printing industry faced one major task – re-defining promotion and advertising in a context where there was virtually no market or competition. These issues were discussed on the pages of *Typografia* in 1950. An unsigned author of a piece entitled 'Socialist Realism and Promotional Work' resolved this matter by making a strict distinction between the "capitalistic advertisement" on the one hand and the "new forms and methods of promotion" in "socialist trade and production" on the other hand.⁷⁹ The former, by definition, can never be "truthful, unprejudiced, and concrete", as in its "falseness and deceitfulness" it is always ruthless and self-imposing and ignores the people's "good taste, morals and nerves". In a planned and competition-free environment, there is "no longer any problem with how and whom to sell the produced goods" and thus no need to "cheat on the consumer". Indeed, without any reference to the shortage of general goods, a characteristic feature of the command economies, the author defines the new role of advertising as follows: "even in the future there will be a need to inform the consumer about the results of the work, about the production achievements of the nationalised industry, about the advantages and new opportunities brought to him by the new socialist trade". In addition, there will be a need to explain and convince consumers that "those requests which are resulting from incorrect thinking based on the residua of capitalistic upbringing in the consumers' minds" simply cannot be satisfied. In other words, advertising was being turned into a propaganda tool with which to promote the new regime, and – contrary to its original function in the market-driven

⁷⁹ "Socialistický realismus a propagační tvorba," [Socialist Realism and Promotional Creative Work], in *Typografia...*, (1950): No. 1, no paging.

environment – an instrument for educating the ‘new consumers’ on limiting their expectations with regard to the supply of goods.

A closely related topic that *Typografia* addressed was the overall changing image of the public space. One author of a rather poetically written text printed in the periodical noted that, like in the process of the post-war de-Germanisation of Czech cities, and following “the decisive turn in the development towards socialism”, the signs of private business were “disappearing day by day as a melting snow under the spring sun”.⁸⁰ The new names of the nationalised companies began to fill the streets, and soon turned into “a friendly smile, a hand shaken with the working people of this state, who are being approached with trust and love”. It is difficult to resist the temptation to bring up the image of Havel’s greengrocer and his shop window nearly thirty years later, when reading the following lines. According to a 1950 issue of *Typografia*, it was not just this “symphony of new words”, but also the design of the shop windows – “always full of goods” and always ready to help celebrate “all the state and socialist festivities” by displaying slogans, posters and pictures – that represented “a major turn in the image of our streets”.

Producing printed matter of good quality soon became one of the key challenges for the command system of production. The author of a text titled ‘On the Quality of Print’ celebrated the achievements of a “tiny handful of people who often had more good will than qualifications”, and yet successfully replaced German printers in the borderland printing companies.⁸¹ Nevertheless, several points that disrupt the picture of achievements and successes can be gleaned from his text. He noted that even with an older machine and under inadequate working conditions “good and conscientious workers could accomplish miracles in terms of quality of workmanship”, but he went on to complain that “many have not yet matured enough” to regard “collective production in the nationalised companies that belong to the entire nation” as sufficient motivation. He cited the example of poster printing, an area where the (collective) clients often commissioned images that were technically impossible to reproduce. He also – rather unintentionally – drew attention to one of the key contradictions of

⁸⁰ “Ulice města mění tvář,” [The Streets of Cities Are Change Their Faces], *Typografia...*, (1950): un-authored, no paging.

⁸¹ SYNEK, “O kvalitu tisku,” [For the Quality of Print], in *Typografia...*, (1950): 80–81.

planned production and trade: he noted that many clients were not ready to accept the fact that a strictly itemised production plan makes it impossible for the printers to meet “unreasonable delivery dates” without compromising the quality of final products.

The theme of planning was of course another hot issue, and the texts dealing with this matter on the pages of *Typografia* ranged from the propagandistic, praising the development of this “major law for constructing socialism ..., a guarantee of higher living and cultural standards” for the people, to still propagandistic but more elaborate attempts at explaining its principles.⁸² One text highlighted the difference between “the ‘old’ rule of unregulated and ferocious supply and demand” and the current “purposeful regulation of economic activities” that takes place “in the interest of general welfare”. The author also explained all the institutional steps involved in the instalment of a plan, starting with the Central Planning Committee right up to the individual companies and workers involved.⁸³ He made no secret of the fact that, owing to the diversity of the printing companies and their production and to the lack of available data on production and sales, the development of appropriate planning methods and forms would still require work. But he concluded his account with an optimistic view of planning as a way to provide “a service that benefits all”.

The mechanisms of control and centralisation of this ‘service’ for common benefit were soon being revised, and by 1952 the government had introduced a new policy on publishing. A fully state-operated distribution company Národní podnik Kniha (National ‘Book’ Company) was set up and supervised by the Hlavní správa vydavatelství, tiskáren a knižního obchodu (Central Administration of Publishing, Printing, and the Book Trade) at the Ministry of Culture. Several new houses were established – with rather bizarre and overly complicated names, following the Russian model – and a new scheme of publishing management was introduced that was essentially divided into three categories. There were publishers directly linked to the Ministry of Culture, such as Orbis, SNTL- Státní nakladatelství technické literatury (State Publishing House for Technical Literature), SNKLHU - Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění (State Publishing House for

⁸² R. Ř., “Socialistické plánování – vstřícné plánování,” [Socialist Planning – Accommodating Planning], *Typografia...*, (1950): no paging.

⁸³ Jar. Šalda, “Plánování v závodech, jeho smysl a úkoly,” [Planning in Enterprises, Its Purpose and Tasks], *Typografia...*, (1950): 1–2.

Belles-Lettres and the Arts), a house built from the remnants of a reputable inter-war publishing company called *Družstevní práce*.⁸⁴ The house was assigned the production of a variety of texts related to literature, arts and propaganda, with a special focus on the ‘treasures’ of national literature, mainly 19th-century classics. In the first decade of its existence it released a thirty-two-volume edition of nationalist historical prose by Alois Jirásek, a thirty-eight-volume edition of the collected works of the late revivalist poet Jan Neruda, and a fifteen-volume edition of writings by a key female revivalist writer, Božena Němcová. Translated texts that followed the prevailing ideology represented a substantial part of the editorial agenda, too, and the house produced 242 books translated from Russian just within the first decade of its existence (1953–1962).⁸⁵ There were also houses overseen by other resorts of the state administration, such as publishers devoted to the production of textbooks and children’s books (SPN - Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, SNDK- Státní nakladatelství dětské knihy) and those that belonged to different parliamentary parties and other mass or centrally controlled organisations (Rudé právo, Lidová demokracie, Mladá fronta, Československý spisovatel). The 1950s also saw the expansion of publishing to district houses in Brno, Liberec, Ostrava, or Olomouc, which to some extent helped to challenge the central position of the capital as the exclusive producer of books.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Družstevní práce*, a renowned publishing house, was established in 1922 as a venture in which all the participants in the institutional book circuit, i.e. readers, authors or, say, designers, had a share. It operated exclusively on the basis of subscriptions, that is, outside the bookselling business. Each member paid annual membership fees and was required to buy four books. To some extent it could be viewed as an experiment by Czech leftwing intellectuals of running a book business based on the participation of the ‘common’ people (it had 100 000 members by 1948), and the house indeed employed some of the country’s leading fiction writers as editors. In 1927 a branch of DP – *Krásná jizba* [A Beautiful Room] was set up as an institution promoting everyday life, modern design, and a new mass life style. Among the designers and architects who worked for this project were Ladislav Sutnar and the photographer Josef Sudek. See Jan Mlčoch et al., *Družstevní práce: Sutnar-Sudek* (Prague: Uměleckoprůmyslové museum, Arbor vitae, 2006), published on the occasion of an exhibition held at UMPRUM Muzeum, 13 December – 18 February 2007.

⁸⁵ See Zdeňka Broukalová and Saša Mouchová, eds., *Bibliografický soupis knih vydaných SNKLU v letech 1953–1962* [A Bibliographical List of Books Published in SNKLU in 1953–1962], preface by Jan Mukařovský, (Prague: SNKLU, 1964). Also discussed in Derek Seyer (1998), 286. As part of the liberal movement, in 1966 this house adopted the name of Jan Froněk’s prestigious pre-1948 publishing house, Odeon, which was known for producing some major texts of Czech inter-war avant-garde literature.

⁸⁶ See “Nakladatelství,” [Publishing Houses], in Janoušek (Vol. 2, 2008), 69–80; Jan Halada, “Předmluva,” [Introduction], in *Encyklopedie ...*, (2007), 7–21.

Following a standard planning model, the Ministry of Culture was responsible for approving yearly publication plans, including print runs and thus also paper allocation. Direct responsibility for the release of a title, however, was in the hands of the editors-in-chief and directors, which after 1953 were supervised by the at that time still very covert HSTD – Hlavní správa tiskového dohledu (Central Administration for Supervision of the Press). As the institutional infrastructure allowing direct and indirect intervention into book production was already in place, and the ‘canon’ of texts deemed appropriate for the reading public had already been defined several years *before* the first office of the pro-active state-operated institution of control over printed matter was established, the question is: was there then a need or even any room for a designated censor’s office in this system? The very process of putting this office together was anything but a simple, radical, straightforward exercise of power. Instead it involved a set of lengthy events shaped by continuous conflicts between group and individual interests, struggles between contradictory outlooks, and a continuous chain of often chaotically issued versions of lists of books to be banned.⁸⁷ It was as if the nature of the institution of the censor’s office itself resisted definition in terms of smooth and straightforward action, and the communists were not the first to have faced the complexity of instituting a list of *libri prohibiti*. For example, the effort to set up pro-active censorship under the Habsburgs was a long-term struggle because “it became impossible to find proper staff for the censor’s office, which required exceptional intelligence”.⁸⁸ And, for example, historical analyses of German censor offices at the beginning of the 19th century have also shown how the members of the censor’s committee, including the famous storyteller Jacob Grimm, were employed on unstable part-time contracts, were poorly paid, and had to follow unclear and often contradictory instructions.⁸⁹

At the very beginning of its existence the HSTD had no clear institutional status; at first it operated as a ‘non-public governmental body’, and only a year later it was transferred to fall under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which had close links to the secret police. Clearly, books represented only one part of an agenda that also encompassed periodicals and non-print media, and even private correspondence

⁸⁷ D. Tomášek (1994).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁹ Frederik F. Ohles, *Germany’s Rude Awakening: Censorship in the Land of the Brothers Grimm* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1992).

was regularly checked. The most difficult issue involved in the process of establishing this office was apparently the matter of human resources. The officials involved in setting up the office constantly complained of delays and difficulties in recruiting the proper candidates for jobs with such important responsibilities, but the size of the office staff nonetheless grew continually to the point where at the start of 1955 it already had 95 employees, of whom 54 worked directly on censoring texts in both periodical and non-periodical publications. An idea of the staff's responsibilities and qualifications can be gleaned from a report on the jobs they held prior to joining the HSTD, in which the employees are listed as having previously worked as shop assistants (eleven cases), manual workers (seven cases), typographers (five cases), and seamstresses (two cases), and so on.⁹⁰ After the HSTD was set up, in 1958 the Ideological Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, headed by Jiří Hendrych, was established in order to "fight the growing liberal tendencies" in society.⁹¹ In addition, not only the ministries of culture and education were able as institutions to intervene in the process of book production, but also powerful, high-ranking individuals could do so.

The activities of the HSTD intensified following the affair that surrounded the 1958 publication of Josef Škvorecký's novel *Zbabělci* (The Cowards). The book offered a picture of the unheroic behaviour of the Czech people during the last days of the Second World War. The author himself was sharply attacked by conservative communist literary critics and temporarily dismissed from his post of editor at a major publishing house – SNKLHU. Through a public campaign, the release of this book was used as an admonishing example of the unpredictable consequences of allowing a liberal approach to cultural management. Just within the year 1959 the HSTD made interventions in over 300 manuscripts of books-in-progress, eliminating references to ideas, places, events, and persons that could be defined as 'anti-socialist'.⁹²

⁹⁰ D. Tomášek (1994), 11, 12.

⁹¹ It operated until 1960 and was renewed again in 1963, this time under Čestmír Císař, a representative of the reformist wing of the Party. See "Ideologická komise ÚV KSČ," [Ideological Committee of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia], Totalita.cz, http://www.totalita.cz/vysvetlivky/cenzura_02.php (accessed 20 March 2008).

⁹² See "Cenzura", in Pavel Janoušek et al., eds., *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989. Díl 3 (1958–1969)* [A History of Czech Literature 1945–1989, Vol. 3, 1958–1969], (Prague: Academia, 2008), 50–53. According to this entry, the Head Office even intervened in the distribution and sale of particular titles after they had already been printed, which was apparently within its authority.

The definition of what was deemed 'undesirable' in writing changed continually with the changing trends in political leadership or even the tastes of politically powerful individuals. Although everything surrounding the development of the first 'censorship' institution was supposed to be strictly confidential, the existence of an explicitly named controlling body had a major effect on local cultural dynamics: it not only further clarified the actual agenda of the current political regime, but even more importantly, it attracted opposition. In other words, it opened up the social space for the formation of self-defining and (self-) instituting, parallel anti-regulatory discourses and cultural practices, a process that was to continue throughout the late 1960s.⁹³

The period of the late 1960s, and especially the period immediately after January 1968, was marked by two seemingly contradictory tendencies in the media and publishing strategy. On the one hand, the government realised the importance of open or at least less restricted, public access to information and free speech, but it also acknowledged the need to avoid needlessly irritating the Soviet leadership. However, at the same time it was unable to define a strict framework within which such public debates were to take place, and thus the responsibility for what would be said remained largely in the hands of individual editors and journalists. In other words, during this period it is important to make a distinction between the very political and institutional history of the censorship office on the one hand, and the actual textual and institutional practices related to book production, such as growing print runs, the diversification of publishing projects, and changes in editorial profiles, on the other.

The relatively stable institutional framework of the nationalised publishing houses, printing industry, distribution and book sales that was established in early 1950s was already beginning to show cracks by the end of that decade, and ideological constraints also gradually weakened. There was a strong need for institutional structures that would be more responsive to the interests of at least some of the parties involved, namely publishers, booksellers, and readers.⁹⁴ The original idea of the Soviet-inspired model of book production, based

⁹³ For the history of censorship of the Czechoslovak print media in the 1960s, see Frank Kaplan, *Winter into Spring: The Czechoslovak Press and the Reform Movement, 1963–1968* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1977).

⁹⁴ "Nakladatelství," [Publishing Houses], in Pavel Janoušek et al., eds., *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989. Díl 3 (1958–1969)* [A History of Czech Literature 1945–1989, Vol. 3, 1958–1969], (Prague: Academia, 2008), 55–60.

on centrally controlled production and the mass distribution of 'high-quality' texts collided with one seemingly simple matter – the growing stock of unwanted (and unsold) books. The economic pressure of accumulating unsaleable books forced the communist government to adopt measures that would loosen the rigid institutional settings. By 1959, the *Sdružení československých nakladatelství a knižního obchodu* (Association of Czechoslovak Publishers and the Book Trade) was set up, and its task was to estimate more realistic print runs, co-ordinate the production of some publishing houses, organise promotional events, and represent domestic book publishing abroad. The association was also joined by the district publishers, which had been set up in each district city, initially with the rather vague editorial mission of promoting texts on local issues, particularly the history of the local working-class movement, and searching for new talents among regional writers.

Within three years, however, the association was dissolved because, it was argued, its activities far exceeded the scope of its actual authority, and control over publishing policy was assumed by the *Československé ústředí knižní kultury* (Central Office of Book Culture). Particular divisions of this institution, along with the ideological committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, whose members intervened in questionable cases, were supposed first to approve a title for publication before it actually landed on the desks of officials at HSTD. This multi-stage system of institutional approvals produced conflicts of interest and authority among the respective offices and generated room for unpredictable interventions by powerful individuals, usually motivated by whatever the current political preferences and aversions were. Such a system made the production of long-term editorial projects, such as encyclopaedias, even more complicated.⁹⁵ At the practical level, there were challenges on the production side of publishing involving printing and paper supply. The system of paper allocation clashed with the growing emphasis on demand-driven print runs. This system, coupled with the powerful political factors that were still crucial for deciding what the print run of a title would be, and with the ever more obsolete printing technology in use, lagging well behind developments in the world and unable to satisfy the requirements of sophisticated book design, resulted in a constant

⁹⁵ Ibid.

shortage of fiction titles and professional and academic titles. In addition, it also lengthened the amount of time required to produce and release a book.

With regard to the actual operations of the state-run publishing houses, among the most obvious changes that were ushered in during the late 1960s was the greater visibility of marketing departments. The monopolistic system of strict genre and content assignments and their division among individual publishing houses was also challenged, but mostly within the rather moderate discourse and political framework of the reformist tendencies in society. Another key trend of this period was the increasing size of print runs, especially of fiction and some non-fiction works. This trend corresponded with the departure from allocation-based book production and the drift towards production responsive to demand, and with the effort of publishers to fill in the gaps in their editorial profiles that had accrued during the 1950s. For example, the first edition of Milan Kundera's *Žert* (*The Joke*), the cult novel of the 1960s, came out in 1967 with a print run of 30 000 copies; in 1968 the second edition was published with a print run of 35 000 copies, and in 1969 the third edition with 54 000 copies – a total of 119 000 copies in just three years.⁹⁶ Paradoxically, the tradition of producing large print runs, established by the centralised publishing policy, turned against the command system in later years. Books released in the few years between the late 1960s and the early 1970s ultimately had to supply almost the two generations of readers that grew up during the normalisation period with the essential basic works of world classics and contemporary domestic texts, as they would not appear in bookstores and libraries again until the late 1980s. So, although *The Joke* was not re-published in Czech until 1991, the text could still be read during the two normalisation decades. Let us imagine, in a very simplified exercise of speculation, that, out of the total print run, each of the approximately 10 000 Czech public libraries had two copies of *The Joke*, while the rest went to bookstores.⁹⁷ Given that Czechs were in the habit of holding on to books and keeping them in their home

⁹⁶ For details about editions and print runs, see the National Library catalogue at www.nkc.cz. Bibliographical references to individual titles released prior to 1990 include information about prices and print runs.

⁹⁷ According to the official statistics, there were 7999 public libraries and 2084 smaller local library branches in the Czech part of the country in 1970. See *Historické údaje. Kultura. Periodický tisk*. [Historical Data, Culture, the Press - Periodicals], Český statistický úřad, <http://www.czso.cz> (accessed 11 November 2008).

libraries, around one hundred thousand copies of *The Joke* could still have remained in private circulation during this period, even though the book, and more exactly, the roughly twenty thousand copies of it, were purged from public libraries during the normalisation era.⁹⁸

A number of readers' clubs were set up during the 1960s (Máj, Klub přátel poezie, Klub mladých čtenářů) and they enjoyed growing pools of subscribers. Club-member readers were defined by their particular distinctive features, such as age (young readers) or interest in a particular genre (poetry), and this differentiation of readers, which was somewhat different from the idea of the 'common reader' as the target group of certain massively produced ideologically 'harmless' texts, served as yet another possible means of undermining centralisation. By the mid-1960s, the district publishers also began to pressure for the expansion of their thematic profile and pool of authors. As part of the growing liberal tendencies, even the symbolic power of names was explored, and the state publishing houses began to change their long, descriptive, Soviet-style names, such as the Krajské nakladatelství v Brně (District Publishing House in Brno), which adopted the short name Blok (Block), or the Východočeské krajské nakladatelství (North Bohemian District Publishing House), which becomes simply Kruh (Circle). Some key Prague-based publishers controlled by the non-communist parliamentary parties referred in their changed names to their pre-war (i.e. pre-socialist) legacy (Melantrich, Vyšehrad).⁹⁹

In more general terms, in the early 1960s the country began witnessing the revival of social organisations and, most importantly, their attempt to obtain at least some independence from the Party's supervision. Many social organisations, including various special-interest associations, clubs, trade unions, women's organisations, or churches, increasingly criticised the current state of affairs in their fields of interest and called for institutional autonomy, but the cultural and arts associations were among the most active in this regard and, from the Party's perspective, the most controversial. This period was symbolically marked by the re-canonisation of Franz Kafka's work at a

⁹⁸ Similarly, another key novel of this period, Vaculík's *Sekyra* [The Axe], was published three times between 1966 and 1969, producing tens of thousands of copies (10 000 in 1966; 35 000 in 1968; there is no record of the number of copies in the print run of the third edition in 1969), and even though it did not reappear in official publishing circles until 1990, a considerable number of those copies continued to circulate among readers.

⁹⁹ J. Halada (2007).

legendary Liblice conference in 1963, seen as an event “breaking through the ramparts around the taboo parts of Czech and world culture”.¹⁰⁰ This period is also closely associated with a boom in literary and cultural periodicals, which were major forums for the debates over the current and future developments in society. Next to journals like *Plamen* (1959–1969), *Orientace* (1966–1970), *Tvář* (1964–1965; 1968–1969) and the Brno-based *Host do domu* (1954–1970), it was mainly the fate of the weekly *Literární noviny*, later on *Literární listy* and *Listy* which reflected the shifting boundaries of liberalisation.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ See Alexej Kusák, *Tance kolem Kafky: liblická konference 1963 - vzpomínky a dokumenty po 40 letech* [Dancing around Kafka: the Liblice Conference of 1963 – Memoirs and Documents 40 Years Later], (Prague: Akropolis, 2003), 76. However, in a review of this book, the literary critic Petr Šámal argued that while from today’s perspective this conference could be seen as the point symbolically marking the onset of certain changes in society, it was by no means the first and only event of its kind. Attempts at different interpretations of Kafka’s work, and, consequently, calls for another but strictly ideological understanding of ‘socialist’ culture were publicly presented prior to the Liblice meeting and were also, for example, preceded by debates on realism that were taking place in Soviet literary and intellectual periodicals from as early as the mid-1950s and that resonated in the local cultural environment. See Petr Šámal, “Franz Kafka jako politikum,” [FK Politicised], *Česká literatura* 52/1 (2004): 121–126. For the conference papers in German translation see Eduard Goldstücker, et al., eds., *Franz Kafka aus Prager Sicht* (Prague: Academia, 1966).

¹⁰¹ For a brief summary of the controversies over *Literární noviny*, see Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54–57, 67–69. See also the entries “*Literární noviny* – 1952–1967,” “*Literární listy* – 1968,” and “*Listy* – 1968–1969,” <http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/index.jsp> (accessed 20 February 2009). For an insider’s account see the memoirs of Milan Jungmann, *Literárky - můj osud. Kritické návraty ke kultuře padesátých a šedesátých let s aktuálními reflexemi* [LN – My Fate: Looking Back Critically on the Culture of the 1950s and 1960s with Some Current Reflections], (Brno: Atlantis, 1999). Originally published by the Writers’ Union, it began in 1952 as a dogmatic pro-communist tool for fighting ‘schematism’ and the “dangerous influences of bourgeoisie idealism” in Czech literature and culture. Although still under strict political supervision since 1955, this weekly began to expand its range of sections, adding readers’ inquiries and essays on ‘Western’ literature. Increasingly, polemical texts continued to appear on its pages in 1956–1958, discussing topics of wider social significance, such as abortion, life style, and interior design. Despite the outside political interventions and changes in the editorial boards (1959), in the early 1960s, and even more so following the Third Congress of the Writers’ Union of 1963, the pool of contributors was expanding and so was the range of issues and views. Open critical attacks on dogmatic approaches to literary history and theory and philosophy, economics and sociology became more frequent, peaking in 1967 after the Fourth Writers’ Congress. The literary critic and journalist Milan Jungmann was an editor at *Literární noviny* from 1955, and in 1964–1967 was its editor-in-chief and also the editor-in-chief of both *Literární listy* and *Listy*. In 1972 he began working as a window cleaner, which he remained until his retirement in 1982.

At the institutional level of state and Party control, the intensity of HSTD's activities began to weaken somewhat in 1964–1965. Although authors of potentially controversial texts still had to accept compromises in order to get their books published, some names of émigré authors were already being included in the new academic dictionary of Czech fiction writers published in 1964.¹⁰² Act No. 81/1966 is considered the first legal act instituting censorship in the history of the socialist Czech media.¹⁰³ In it Article No. 1 states: “in compliance with the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression, speech and press, the citizens use the periodical press and other mass media in order to obtain information and publicly express their views on all issues concerning the life of society and the state”.¹⁰⁴ The argument then progresses rather logically. Freedom of speech is “guaranteed by the fact that the publishing and printing companies, radio, television, and film are placed at the disposal of the working people and their organisations. These means are collectively owned and cannot be the subject of private entrepreneurship”. The assurance about the collective ownership of the media is followed by a definition of the mission of the media in Article 2, which is to provide “timely, truthful, and comprehensive information” and to promote “the interests of socialist society”. The media should also support socialist society’s goals and contribute to “the development of the socialist consciousness of citizens in the spirit of the principles of the constitution and the ideas of the politics of the Czechoslovak Communist Party as the leading force in the state”.

The publishing houses (in the case of print media) or the respective managing institutions (in the case of other media) were supposed to ensure the fulfilment of this social mission. The publishing and managing institutions also authorised the editor-in-chief to control and manage the content of particular editions. Part 5 Article 16 contained specific instructions concerning the abuse of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech: “the publisher, editor-in-chief, editor and author are held responsible for the protection of society and citizens

¹⁰² Rudolf Havel et al., eds., *Slovník českých spisovatelů* [A Dictionary of Czech Writers], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1964).

¹⁰³ See Jan Čulík, “Czech Republic,” in *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, Vol.1, ed. Derek Jones (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 621 – 631.

¹⁰⁴ “81. Zákon ze dne 25. října 1966 o periodickém tisku a o ostatních hromadných informačních prostředcích,” [Act of 25 October 1966 on the Periodical Press and Other Mass Media]; Available in pdf format at: http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/archiv2008/sbirka/1966/zakon_4q.html#castka_36.

against the abuse of the freedom of expression, speech and press". An institution whose role was "to help to protect the interests of the socialist society" was then the newly established ÚPS - Ústřední publikační správa (Central Publication Office). This was to ensure that no mass media publicise any information containing state secrets, and while the ÚPS was authorised to stop publication of such information, the editorial boards were now entitled to appeal to the district court if they found the decision of the ÚPS improper. This *de facto* meant that the 'censor's' office had become "an organ of state administration", and its employees were no longer affiliated with secret police, even though the staff at both the central and local levels remained more or less unchanged and the office was still accountable to the minister of internal affairs. Also its authority to intervene was now regulated and reduced to matters of state secrets. In practice, the threats of a court hearing often tended to limit the activities of ÚPS officials.¹⁰⁵

However, overall and especially in the area of book publishing, the new law was considered somewhat disappointing.¹⁰⁶ It retained a number of regulatory practices that were already established, such as interim interventions in the published text. At the same time, though, it did stipulate that matters of 'public interest' were to be discussed with the editors-in-chief and publishers rather than directly banned, and the final decision was to be taken by the court. Nor did the new law significantly change the practice of having to get certain titles and authors approved for publication, since the newly set up ÚPS essentially adopted the list of banned authors from its predecessor, the HSTD. The list grew following the affairs surrounding the Czechoslovak Writer's Congress and *Literární noviny* in 1967, expanding to include the key protagonists in these affairs, such as Eduard Goldstücker, Milan Kundera, and Bohumil Hrabal. The significance of the 4th Czechoslovak Writer's Congress, which was held in Prague on 27–29 June 1967, went far beyond the world of literature. It was seen as to date the first open demonstration of the need for a critical revision of the past and a call to unravel the control over the printed matter. Intellectuals and writers used the Czechoslovak involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967 as an opportunity to initiate debates about the current Czechoslovak government's foreign and domestic policies. Ludvík

¹⁰⁵ See "Omezení zásahů cenzorů," [Limiting the Censors' Interventions], Totalita.cz, http://www.totalita.cz/vysvetlivky/cenzura_02.php (accessed 20 March 2008).

¹⁰⁶ See "Cenzura," in P. Janoušek (Vol. 3, 2008), 52.

Vaculík, for example, stated that “over the past twenty years not a single human problem – including basic requirements such as housing, schools, and a prospering economy ... and the need for trust among people and a better education for the masses – has been solved”. Pavel Kohout claimed that it was the Congress’s duty “to demand an amendment to the press law so that each author should have the right to defend the freedom of their speech within the framework ... of the constitution”. Milan Kundera (at least at that point) admonished Czech writers to acknowledge their “responsibility for the very existence of their nation”, and suggested that “any interference with freedom of thought and words ... is a scandal in the twentieth century”.¹⁰⁷

This discourse could not “leave any genuine communist indifferent”, or so said the chief Party ideologist and Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee Jiří Hendrych in his “Response”.¹⁰⁸ Hendrych

¹⁰⁷ See 4. sjezd Svazu československých spisovatelů (Protokol) [4th Czechoslovak Writers’ Congress (Protocol)], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1968), 131–162. Cited from English translations in *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, compiled and edited by Jaromír Navrátil, et al., transl. by Mark Kramer, Joy Moss, Ruth Tosek; preface by Václav Havel (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 8–11.

¹⁰⁸ Cited from “Excerpts from Jiří Hendrych’s Response,” in *The Prague Spring...*, (1998), 11. Jiří Hendrych (1913–1979) was a professional apparatchik actively involved in the communist movement since his late teens. He participated in the communist anti-fascist resistance movement during the war, was jailed in Mauthausen (1942–1945), and in 1946–1971 was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and was mostly engaged in its ideology, propaganda and culture sections. He was a secretary of the Central Committee in 1954–1968, and led its Ideological Committee between 1965 and 1968. After 1968, he was criticised and removed from all his posts. See “Jiří Hendrych,” in Jiří Knapík, *Kdo byl kdo v naší kulturní politice 1948–1953: biografický slovník stranických a svazových funkcionářů, státní administrativy, divadelních a filmových pracovníků, redaktorů* [Who Was Who in Our Cultural Politics 1948–1953: A Biographical Dictionary of Party and Union Officials, State Administration, Workers in Theatre and Film, Editors], (Prague: Libri, 2002), 98. It must be noted that it is not easy to obtain accurate biographical data on some of the key players of the Cold War period, not even those involved in its turning points, like the events of the late 1960s. Memoirs and biographies of some top leaders do exist (Dubček, Gottwald), and, for example, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes is conducting a project called *Vedoucí funkcionáři Komunistické strany Československa 1921–1989* [Leading Officials of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 1921–1989], available at <http://www.ustrcr.cz/cs/vedouci-funkcionari-ksc-1921-1989> (accessed 3 March 2009), which to date has compiled just short biographies of twelve key Party officials. Nevertheless, more detailed information on the lives and careers of other, perhaps somewhat ‘second-rate’, but still powerful and important actors remains largely unavailable. Knapík’s *Kdo byl kdo* thus represents a unique source of professional data on persons actively involved in the early period of the socialisation of Czech cultural institutions. I would also like to thank doc. Knapík for online consultation on Hendrych’s career.

further voiced the view of the Party's Presidium, which "condemned the attempts to ... misuse [the Congress's] forum for the presentation of views that run directly contrary to the state, socialist, and even national interests of our people". He also 'sincerely' warned the comrades in the auditorium "that in view of the rhetoric of symbols, allegories, and insinuations that were frequently heard at the congress, one cannot help but wonder what objectives certain writers are pursuing..."¹⁰⁹ He provided an answer to this seemingly rhetorical question at a meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Party held a few months later. He proposed strict disciplinary proceedings be launched against the most outspoken Union members and suggested transferring the weekly *Literární noviny* and the majority of the state-operated publishing houses to come under the direct control of the Ministry of Culture.¹¹⁰ While the proposal to transfer the publishing houses was rejected, neither the leading figures of rebellious literary circles nor their key periodical *Literární noviny* found any supporters among even the future reformers, like Alexander Dubček and Oldřich Černík (the latter eventually became a prime minister in Dubček's government).¹¹¹ The Presidium issued a "Resolution" in September 1967, which led to the expulsion of the writers Ivan Klíma, Antonín J. Liehm, and Ludvík Vaculík from the Party, Pavel Kohout came away with just a warning, and disciplinary proceedings were ordered against Milan Kundera.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *The Prague Spring...*, (1998), 11.

¹¹⁰ The weekly *Literární noviny*, which was prohibited from publishing the full proceedings of the Congress, was – following Hendrych's proposal – made a periodical of the Ministry of Culture, all the editors were fired, and a new editorial team was set up. The periodical continued to be published under the same title and sent to the existing list of subscribers, but it had new content and new editors, headed by Jan Zelenka, who later became the general director of 'normalised' Czechoslovak Television for twenty years (1969–1989). The periodical essentially defended the leading role of the Party, and as such was largely boycotted by most reformist intellectuals. It was re-named *Kulturní noviny* in February 1968, but was suspended two months later.

¹¹¹ See K. Williams (1997), 55; in reference to the Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

¹¹² Jan Procházka, a screenwriter, film producer, and journalist, formerly a member of the Ideological Committee of the Party (1962–1967) and of President Novotný's advisory team, and the deputy chairman of the Writers' Union in 1968–1969, was released from his post at the Party's Central Committee for his "political and ideological standards" which did not "correspond to the requirements arising from this office". See "Resolution of the September 1967 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Central Committee Plenum" in *The Prague Spring...*, (1998), 12.

Soon after the January 5th plenum, which replaced Antonín Novotný with Alexander Dubček as First Party Secretary and introduced the ‘principles of democratic centralism’ for application in party management, communication between the communist leaders and the media came to a gradual halt.¹¹³ Hendrych, a few months after his dogmatic involvement in the aftermath of the Writers’ Congress, began to transform into an advocate of the increasingly powerful reformist trends and approved publication of the new periodical of the Writers’ Union *Literární listy*.¹¹⁴ Hendrych also stopped his regular news briefings, where editors received instructions about the content that they were to publish in their respective periodicals.¹¹⁵ The decision to revoke the August 1966 Act, i.e. a legalised form of press control, was approved by the Presidium on 4 March 1968, also on the basis of his proposal.¹¹⁶ Amendments to the bill, such as Article No. 17 stating that ‘censorship is unacceptable’, were passed on 26 June 1968, but the bill retained the clause allowing the court to prosecute any violation of ‘state, economic or professional secrets’.¹¹⁷ The ÚPS was abolished a few days before that

¹¹³ See “Resolution of the CPCz CC Plenum, January 5, 1968, Electing Alexander Dubček as First Secretary,” in *The Prague Spring 1968 ...* (1998), 34–36. Dubček himself apparently had no direct contact with the editors of the Communist Party’s leading daily *Rudé právo*, and it was not until February that he issued some rather vague instructions to Jiří Pelikán, the director of Czechoslovak Television, instructing state television to calm down the public in order to avoid any discontent of the Soviet leadership. Hendrych himself also gave permission to the Central Committee members to openly discuss the January plenum’s conclusions.

¹¹⁴ All the former contributors of *Literární noviny*, including its editor-in-chief Milan Jungmann, moved to *Literární listy*, which was launched on 29 February 1968.

¹¹⁵ Hendrych’s personality is documented, for example, in a posthumously published memoir by Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, Brezhnev’s foreign policy advisor, who also attended the meetings between Brezhnev and the Communist Party officials held in Prague in December 1967. He recalls that “Brezhnev had a very low opinion of the CC Secretary J. Hendrych, regarding him as merely an ambitious apparatchik-careerist”. Most of the Czech officials present at the meetings questioned Novotný’s capacity to effectively lead the party and the country. And when Brezhnev directly asked Hendrych who in his view “had the sufficient skill and authority to replace Novotný in his posts (the secretarial and presidential), Hendrych immediately replied without batting an eyelid: ‘I do.’” See “Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov’s Memoir of the Pre-Crisis Period (Excerpt),” in *The Prague Spring 1968 ...* (1998), 21–22. Similar views on Hendrych’s personality could be also found in Alexander Dubček’s *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubcek*, ed. and transl. (from the original Czech) by Jiri Hochman (Tokyo, New York: Kodansha, 1993), 120–123.

¹¹⁶ See K. Williams (1997), 67–69.

¹¹⁷ “84/1968 Zákon ze dne 26. června 1968, kterým se mění zákon č. 81/1966 Sb. o periodickém tisku a o ostatních hromadných informačních prostředcích,” [Act No. 84/1968 of 26 June 1968 Amending Act No. 81/1966 on Periodicals and Other Mass Media], available in pdf format at: http://web.mvcr.cz/archiv2008/sbirka/1968/zakon_2q.html#castka_26 (accessed 20 March 2009). As Williams noted, the originally

in statutory order No. 69/1968 of 13 June 1968, signed by Gustáv Husák, and for at least several months the explicit institution of direct control over printed matter was eliminated.¹¹⁸

There is already a large amount of scholarship, both Czech and foreign, examining the legacy of the Prague Spring, so just a few notes about its impact on book production and reception will be made here.¹¹⁹ Like in every other sphere of national production, the reformed system of book production was to remain *socialist*, in the sense that “the individual firms would remain under state ownership, but they would behave in response to supply and demand more in the ways that capitalist markets do”.¹²⁰ The idea of mixing planning and the market was a key motif of the economic reform, but views on its practicality varied significantly. The more conservative economists considered any market relations between state enterprises to be a fantasy, the younger and more radical ones advocated the market as the leading principle of the economy, while those in the middle (represented by the most influential economist in Czechoslovakia at the time, Ota Šik) promoted a highly ‘regulated market’ that would benefit from the positive features of the market economy.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the key principles of allocation, regulation, and collective ownership remained basically untouched, and this applied to book publishing, distribution and sales, too. While a wider range of books ‘with a human face’ began appearing in bookstores, the size of their print runs was more sensitive to the

planned new press law was delayed by lengthy discussions between the Ministry of Culture and the professional unions (writers and journalists), so the existing act had to be amended instead. Even on 25 June, the day before the parliamentary session that was to pass the bill, heated debates were still taking place between the amendment’s opponents (Mlynář) and supporters (Černík, Císař, Husák). See K. Williams (1997), 88–89.

¹¹⁸ See Statutory Order No. 69/1968 – “Vládní nařízení ze dne 13. června 1968, kterým se zrušuje statut Ústřední publikační správy,” [The Statutory Order of 13 June 1968 Abolishing the Status of Central Publishing Office], available in pdf format at: <http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/archiv2008/sbirka/1968/sb23-68.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ The most frequently cited foreign works include K. Williams (1997); V. V. Kusin (1971); Vladimír V. Kusin, *From Dubček to Charter 77: A Study of ‘Normalisation’ in Czechoslovakia 1968–1978* (Edinburgh: Q Press, 1978); H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976). Recent domestic studies on 1968 include J. Vykoukal et al. (2000); Jiří Hoppe, *Pražské jaro v médiích: Výběr z dobové publicistiky* [Prague Spring in the Media: A Selection of Contemporary Journalism], (Prague, Doplněk, 2004); *Pražské jaro 1968: Literatura - film - média* [Prague Spring 1968: Literature, Film, Media], (Prague: Literární akademie, 2009).

¹²⁰ C. Skalník Leff (1997), 58.

¹²¹ K. Williams (1997), 22.

expected demand, and direct control over both non-periodical and periodical publications relaxed to an extent unknown since 1948, no substitute was introduced for the *institutional* mechanisms of regulating the number and type of texts allowed into the process of book production and reception. The 'socialist' principle of cultural production, in which, as Haraszti puts it, "permission replaces purchase",¹²² remained in place, and the 'common' ownership of the means of textual production was not seriously challenged. Consequently, the subsequent normalisation period did not have to waste time fixing up any major deviations in the actual books-related institutional infrastructure. All its leaders had to do was to replace the key players in the system.

But one consequence – and from the perspective of the position of the book in society, a particularly significant one – of the 1968 events should not be underestimated. It is commonly known that the main way in which the regime dealt with undesirable subjects and texts was not to confront them in an open, public, critical dispute, but rather to isolate them completely from the public discourse and condemn them to solitude. As Foucault observed, "solitude is the primary condition of total submission".¹²³ As will be discussed below, the communist authorities succeeded in expanding the realm of 'silences' to an extent unseen before. Although the silencing tools varied and the list of silenced books and authors was never fixed, the very fact of having been labelled a 'silenced text' increased the text's attraction in the cultural and social counter-spaces outside the official sphere, and within the official sphere may a once silenced text later experienced a comeback. This interplay between 'loudness' and 'solitude' (to paraphrase the title of Hrabal's famous story), between the visible and the invisible, had one major effect. It yet again reinforced the social prestige of the book as a tool of social communication, a tool of identity-building or a status symbol. As a result, not just members of the intellectual elite, but also members of society who, perhaps under different circumstances, would have preferred to invest their energy, time, and cash into other areas of consumption, were willing to queue up in front of bookstores.¹²⁴

¹²² M. Haraszti (1987), 81.

¹²³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 237.

¹²⁴ Possible evidence of this concern with books would include the average size of private libraries in the country, i.e. an issue to be yet addressed.

The unsatisfied demand for particular titles generated a specific system of 'marketing silence'. Thus, instead of centrally engineered tastes and planned cultural politics, i.e. the originally 'reader-centred' model of book production and reception to use Dobrenko's terms, what actually dominated the late socialist book scene were the accumulated 'silences' created by the institutional barriers between the reader and the text, and even officially funded reading research seemed – indirectly – to confirm this trend. This system of institutional barriers and the increasingly well-established ways of bypassing them were becoming more and more unbearable even for those who might originally have supported the dominating regime in the first place and in one way or another even benefited from it. As I shall try to demonstrate in the next chapters, by the late 1980s it had become a burden for both the ruled and the rulers. To sum up in a brutally simplified fashion, readers were unhappy about having to queue up in front of bookstores, booksellers about not having much to sell, and authors about not being able to publish enough or at all. When a title in demand managed to sneak through the system in a suitable print run and thus satisfied the needs of the reader, the author, and the bookseller, those in charge panicked over the breakdown of the fragile system of planning and control. Thus, even the representatives of the authorities themselves ended up frustrated and with fears and consequently contributed to the creation of a generally tense atmosphere, 'pregnant with change', as the regime moved into its final years.

CHAPTER FIVE

PERFORMING SILENCES

At the level of political history, the Warsaw Pact military invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 has already been thoroughly covered by international and Czech scholars.¹ It is perhaps obvious but it is worth stressing that during and in the aftermath of the August events it was the press and other mass media rather than non-periodical publishing that was of primary interest to the invaders, as periodicals were one of the main links between the public and the country's political leadership. In the Moscow Protocol of 24 August that the Prague Spring leaders were forced to sign in Moscow shortly after the invasion, Article 4 "emphasised the significance of such important measures as control of the mass media so that they are wholly at the services of socialism".²

¹ Leaving aside the many international conferences that have taken place since the mid-2000s and the conference proceedings they have generated (i.e. Petr Blažek, Lukasz Kamiński and Rudolf Vévoda, eds., *Polsko a Československo v roce 1968. Sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní vědecké konference* [Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1968. International Conference Proceedings], (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, Dokořán, 2006); Zuzana Zelenická, ed., *Sborník příspěvků z konference '40 let po okupaci' 20. srpna 2008* [Conference proceedings "Forty Years after the Occupation, 20 August 2008"], (Prague: Senát Parlamentu České republiky, 2008), there are also reliable on-line resources, i.e. '1968' on the website of the Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů/Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, <http://www.ustrcr.cz/cs/srpen-1968> (accessed 20 March 2009); "Pražské jaro 1968. Chronologie" on the website of the Institute for Contemporary History, <http://www.68.usd.cas.cz/cz/chronologie.html>. Several major texts on the topic exist in English (Williams, 1997; Gordon H. Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976; Renner, 1989; Duček, 1993; *The Prague Spring* ..., 1998). For extensive lists of resources, see particularly a bibliography in Williams, 1997 (pp. 254–265) and *The Prague Spring* ..., 1998 (pp. 583–590) and perhaps the most concise list of resources in Czech as well as other European languages in "Pražské jaro 1968. Bibliografie," <http://www.68.usd.cas.cz/cz/chronologie.html> (accessed 20 March 2009).

² The Moscow Protocol was signed in Moscow by Czechoslovak leaders, including Dubček, following three days of negotiation (23–26 August 1968) over a Soviet draft of the future steps towards the 'normalisation' of the country and the elimination of 'counter-revolutionary' forces. Czechoslovak politicians were essentially forced to accept all the Soviet conditions, including – beyond the re-installment of the Party's full control over the media – returning to a more strictly centralised economy, banning alternative political groups, the dismissal of reformist politicians, complete subordination to Soviet international politics, and the absence of any specific plan for the withdrawal of Warsaw Pact troops from the country's territory. At first, the protocol was

One of the key issues addressed in the document was “the prohibition of anti-socialist and anti-Soviet expressions in the press, on radio, and on television”. While the Protocol is generally viewed as the outcome of the weak and, in a way, cowardly behaviour of the Czechoslovak reformist politicians, Williams noted that they could “at least promise that normalisation would have a human face”.³ The ‘recommendations’ from the Soviet Communist Party Propaganda Department issued on 6 September, just a few days prior to the adoption of the new press law, was equally explicit about the measures to be taken. First of all, it clearly demonstrated that the strict media control declared in the Moscow Protocol was not reflected in actual practice. The department’s representatives acknowledged that “anti-socialist propaganda in the press and radio in the ČSSR is still raging in full force both directly and covertly, and anti-Soviet propaganda continues in both Czech and Slovak on Western radio stations without any attempt at resistance made by the Czechoslovak propaganda organs”. The ‘recommendation’ suggested enhancing radio propaganda by setting up a broadcast centre in Poland or GDR; intensifying the distribution of Soviet printed matter; publishing covert propaganda articles in the international press “about the ties of the anti-socialist underground in Czechoslovakia with foreign radio broadcasters”; and directing visits from Soviet officials to the country towards depriving the ‘small group’ around Dubček “of a

treated as a secret, but *The New York Times* published it on 8 September, and both Smrkovský and Dubček began referring to it in their public appearances shortly afterward. The full version of the document was not published in the country until over twenty years later. See “The Moscow Protocol, August 26, 1968” and the accompanying comments in *The Prague Spring 1968...*, (1998), 477–480.

³ K. Williams (1997), 143. He also quotes the memorandum from the party’s information department which noted that after the Dubček’s announcement of the communiqué, which came out of the Moscow meeting, “the initial reaction of party organs, mass membership, and the general public alike was strongly negative. The talks in Moscow were characterized as outright capitulation”. (p. 146) Also, according to later responses to the Moscow meeting, even though the days spent in Moscow were extraordinarily frustrating and stressful for the Czechoslovak representatives, they were in a situation to refuse participation in this kind of negotiation. Without their help to pacify the country’s population the Soviets would not have been able to make a move, as – at least in the international perspective – they had to avoid further bloodshed. See the interview with the head of the Institute for Contemporary History, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic Oldřich Tůma: “Moskevské protokoly měli čeští politici odmítnout,” [Czech Politicians Should Have Rejected the Moscow Protocols], <http://www.e15.cz/rozhovory/oldrich-tuma-moskevskie-protokoly-meli-cesti-politici-odmitnout-43534/> (accessed 23 March 2009).

monopoly on the right to inform the leading party and state cadres in the ČSSR” about Soviet-Czechoslovak relations.⁴

Less than three months after the adoption of Article 17 and three weeks after the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops, an amended Act No. 127/1968 was adopted on 13 September 1968 with virtually no discussion in the Czech National Assembly and still signed by the key politicians of the Prague Spring—Svoboda, Smrkovský and Černík.⁵ The new act stated in the first article that “in the interest of further peaceful development it is necessary that no important interests of the state’s domestic and foreign policies are disturbed”. It provided for the establishment of the new Office for the Press and Information, (ÚTI - Úřad pro tisk a informace), which was replaced in January 1969 by designated institutions for the Czech and Slovak parts of the federation: the Czech Office for Press and Information (ČÚTI - Český úřad pro tisk a informace) and the Slovak Office for Press and Information (SÚTI - Slovenský úřad pro tisk a informace).⁶ Article 3 explicitly blocked Article 17 and authorised the new press control office to ensure that no information in conflict with state interests be published. Should such information be publicised after all, the press control office or a representative of it had the authority to suspend publication or further distribution of the text in question. The main purpose of this legislation and the urgency with which it was adopted was clearly linked to the need to control media reports about the occupation and the activities of the Soviet troops.

In 1980 a new umbrella office was set up called the Federal Office for Press and Information (FÚTI - Federální úřad pro tisk a informace),

⁴ The ‘recommendations’ were produced by a working group of the Propaganda Department of the Soviet Communist Party’s Central Committee, which had monitored the situation in the Czechoslovakia since the military invasion. The report was completed by the deputy head of the department and the deputy head of Soviet television and radio in order to outline ways of enforcing Soviet propaganda in the country. See “Recommendations from the CPSU CC Propaganda Department on Efforts to Establish Political Control in Czechoslovakia, September 6, 1968 (Excerpts)” and the accompanying comments in *The Prague Spring 1968...*, (1998), 497.

⁵ See “Zákon o některých přechodných opatřeních v oblasti tisku a ostatních hromadných informačních prostředků, č. 127/1968 Sb. ze dne 13. září 1968”. [Act on Some Temporary Measures in the Area of the Press and other Mass Media] Available in pdf format from: <http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/archiv2008/sbirka/1968/sb36-68.pdf>. On the absence of any oppositional voices to the amendment in Parliament see K. Williams (1997), 161.

⁶ Dušan Tomášek, *Pozor, cenzurováno! aneb ze života soudružky cenzury* [Attention, Censored! Or from the Life of Comradess Censor], (Prague: Vyd. a nakl. MV ČR, 1994), 152–157.

which was to take over the responsibilities of ČÚTI and SÚTI relating to the national mass media, while regional and various district periodicals continued to be monitored by the Czech and Slovak offices. FÚTI was directly connected to the respective departments of the Party. While these offices and their predecessors primarily oversaw the mass media, including the print media, and book control was handed to a special book division at the Ministry of Culture, some of their employees intervened in book publishing on their own initiative. The most active clerks were capable of digging up almost unbelievably ‘subversive’ meanings, even in stories for children. For example, the publication of a story for children was banned in 1970 because the censor suggested that the figures of a bad bear and a red devil might potentially symbolise the Russian occupation of the country.⁷ Much of the responsibility for what would or would not be released was in the hands of the senior management of each publishing house, more so than it was really up to any identifiable censor, and this paved the way for the kind of ongoing negotiations and renegotiations discussed above. It could even be said that, as a result, the censors lacked opportunities for intervention, and their desperate attempt to identify absurd meanings in the published texts may be seen as evidence of their need to invent projects. Nevertheless, records of their activities, especially in the late 1980s, exhibit a kind of stubbornness and profound lack of readiness for the substantial changes that were beginning to affect these institutions and those employed in them. A good example is a case where the head of one of FÚTI’s divisions made a request, at the late date of 13 November 1989, to create seven new posts in order to expand his unit, as the Party – “following the recent developments” in the states of the Eastern bloc – had set the unit the new task of monitoring the Hungarian, Polish, East German, and Romanian daily press and some periodicals published in the USSR.⁸

From the perspective of institutional structure, given that the organisation of the publishing system remained essentially unchallenged, the ‘normalisation’ of book production and reception was relatively an easy task.⁹ Following the recommendations of the Central Committee

⁷ See Jiří Sítler, “Cenzura v předlistopadovém Československu,” [Censorship in pre-November Czechoslovakia], *Dějiny a současnost* 20/6 (1998): 35–38.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹ For a highly informative account of the socio-economic and political situation in 1980s Czechoslovakia, see Jiří Vykoukal, Bohuslav Litera, Miroslav Tejchman, *Východ: vznik, vývoj a rozpad sovětského bloku 1944–1989* [The East: The Origins, Development

of the Communist Party, the book division of the Ministry of Culture – the body responsible for publishing at the national (not federal) level—appointed an Editorial Board of loyal writers and poets, whose role was to oversee the transformation back to the state of affairs before 1968. Its prime task then was to revamp the editorial policy of the individual houses in conformity with the reinstalled, but largely unwritten, pro-regime guidelines. The production of titles-in-progress was interrupted; distribution of already produced titles was blocked. Over 130 titles, mostly fiction and professional literature in the area of the humanities, had been withdrawn from production or distribution by September 1970.¹⁰

The files on unpublished projects found in the archives of the publishing houses, like that of the Communist Party's leading publishing house Svoboda (Freedom), contain numerous references to book operations in the early 1970s, when the aftermath of August 1968 was hitting the publishing sector with particular intensity.¹¹ The year 1970 was when the process of vetting Party IDs and a purging procedure took place.¹² The political profile of a future member of the Party was

and Collapse of the Soviet Bloc, 1944–1989], (Prague: Libri, 2000), 584–593. For a brief account in English of the key issues regarding the 'normalisation' period, see, for example, Vladimír V. Kusin, "Husak's Czechoslovakia and Economic Stagnation," *Problems of Communism* (May–June 1982), 24–37. Also available at: <http://www.cla.wayne.edu/polisci/kdk/easteurope/sources/kusin.htm>.

¹⁰ "Nakladatelství," [Publishing Houses], in Pavel Janoušek et al., eds., *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989. Díl 4 (1969–1989)* [History of Czech Literature 1945–1989, Vol. 4, 1969–1989], (Prague, Academia 2008), 57–66.

¹¹ Svoboda publishing house was an official publication outlet of the Communist Party. It was established under this name already in 1945, in 1953 renamed as Státní nakladatelství politické literatury (State Publishing House of Political Literature), in 1959 as Nakladatelství politické literatury, and since 1966 it operated under the original name *Svoboda* with a few variations (Nakladatelství Svoboda-Libertas 1991–1994) up to 1997. The un-processed and inaccessible archives currently include files from the period 1952–1997, the majority of which are administrative documents such as correspondence, the editor-in-chief's instructions, and production records related to particular titles.

¹² Although still in 1969 Husák denied any special purging procedures that might follow the 1968 events, it was decided to combine the essentially administrative procedure of vetting the Party IDs with a purging procedure. The proposal for the purging procedure was submitted to the Presidium of the Central Committee in January 1970 that approved a letter of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia about the Party ID vetting to all regional organisations and members and was published in *Rudé právo* on 3 February 1970. Even though the very purpose of this process was partially covered up in the document, its main aim was to expel all the members who had followed the reformist and 'counter-revolutionary' tendencies and the Party organs would decide about purging individual members, which *de facto*

strictly defined and was to exclude those who held anti-Party attitudes or revised views of Marxism-Leninism, questioned the pro-Soviet orientation of the country, and did not appreciate the 'brotherly help' from the Soviets in August 1968.¹³ A proposal (dated June 1973) to cancel publication of a science-fiction novel, the reprint of which was contracted by Svoboda on 6 August 1968, simply states that "the reprint could not be published in 1970 for the author had been expelled from the Party owing to his attitudes in 1968–1969. For these reasons he was unacceptable as an author of a Party publishing house". The withdrawal of projects from Svoboda's publication plan, in most cases for political reasons, led to substantial financial losses, which as a subsidised house not operating in standard market conditions Svoboda was evidently able to endure. In a letter dated December 1970 the house tried to force an author to pay back the 25 000 Czechoslovak Crowns advance he had received in 1968, but the records show that the house had to admit the impossibility of taking the author to court, as it "was obliged by the contract to produce at least 20 000 copies of the book and thus would have to pay the author 40 000 Czechoslovak Crowns ... i.e. 90% of the honoraria." The house decided it was better write off the advance of 25 000.¹⁴

In a number of cases, however, the house pursued a variety of alternative avenues in order to get rid of suddenly unwanted manuscripts. Late submission was one of the most commonly used arguments. For example, an autobiography of Rudolf Hösse, the first commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp, was approved for publication in April 1966 with an anticipated release in 1967, but in June 1971 the house sent a letter to the translator informing him of its decision to

represented a revaluation of the entire reformist process. The majority of interviews with the Party members took place in the second half of 1970, but the vetting was not fully completed until the middle of 1970. See Jiří Maňák, *Čistky v Komunistické straně Československa v letech 1969 – 1970* [Purges in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 1969–1970], (Prague: AV ČR. Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1997), 36–44.

¹³ According to a speech by one of the leading 'normalisers', Jan Fojtík, delivered at the third meeting of the Ideological Committee of the Central Committee of the Party held 19 October 1970, approximately 50% of communists left the professional intellectual and cultural organisations. See Milan Otáhal, *Podíl tvůrčí inteligence na pádu komunismu: Kruh nezávislé inteligence* [The Contribution of the Intelligentsia to the Collapse of Communism: The Circle of Independent Intelligentsia], (Brno: Doplněk, 1999), 21.

¹⁴ Vejdělek, Čestmír, *Návrat z ráje* [Return from Paradise], (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1961). For the correspondence, see Národní archiv [NA - National Archive], "ÚV KSČ Svoboda. Dokumenty k publikacím – nevydané: Ve-Ž"; file "Vejdělek," Box No. 86.

withdraw from the contract because the manuscript was late. In a letter of August 1970 the translator defended himself and referred to an extension that was agreed until late 1970 or early 1971, and somewhat opportunistically he argued that, not only was 50–60% of the translation already completed, but that “the text remains ideologically current even now, i.e. after 1968–1969, when some tendencies to seek parallels between ‘totalitarianism’ and fascism were emerging”. A thin book *Knížka na noční stolek* (A Bedside Book) by Jan Werich – a major figure in the legendary inter-war avant-garde theatre Osvobozené divadlo (The Liberated Theatre) – was contracted for publication in October 1969. On 17 June 1970 a letter was sent to the eminent 65-year-old author simply stating that “the house is withdrawing from the contract as you were supposed to deliver the manuscript on 31 December 1969”.

One story that is emblematic of the book dynamics of the early 1970s involves the famous travellers, journalists, and writers Miroslav Zikmund and Jiří Hanzelka.¹⁵ The high standing of these two authors in the book market in the 1960s and their subsequent decline in status in the 1970s can be followed in the archives of their publisher Svoboda. For example, according to the minutes of a meeting with Miroslav Zikmund in May 1965, the house agreed to publish one new volume of their travel literature every year, each with an approximate print run of 50 000, and to speed up the editing of the manuscripts the two authors had recently submitted.¹⁶ The authors had 1000 copies of each title at their own disposal, while a person referred to as comrade Novák was instructed “to secure the appropriate amount of paper”. The last book

¹⁵ Miroslav Zikmund (1919) and Jiří Hanzelka (1920–2003) undertook several major expeditions to Africa, South and Central America, Asia, Indonesia, including Central Asia. (1947–1950, 1959–1964). On the way they collected substantial amount of materials, including reportages, audio records, documentary and feature films, and during the 1950s and 1960s published ten titles of travel literature. Their writing style combined high competence with elaborate narrative skills, and often included a philosophical message about the current state of humankind. They both joined the reformist communist movement of the 1960s and until 1969 even served as key symbols of the movement. Consequently, they were excluded from public life (including proper employment and publishing) until 1989. See Jaromír Slonek, *Jiří Hanzelka - Miroslav Zikmund: Život snů a skutečnosti* [Jiří Hanzelka - Miroslav Zikmund: Life of Dreams and Reality] (Prague: Primus, 1997).

¹⁶ For all the documents quoted below, see Národní archiv [NA - National Archive], “ÚV KSČ Svoboda. Dokumenty k publikacím – nevydané: Ve-Ž” [Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Svoboda – Documents on Publications – Unpublished: Ve-Ž]; file “Zikmund-Hanzelka,” Box No. 86.

by Zikmund and Hanzelka that was released after the events of 1968 was *Světadíl pod Himalájem* (The Continent below the Himalayas), which came out in the summer of 1970 (dated 1969) with a print run of 120 000. But the book was distributed almost exclusively to subscribers, and the book wholesale company Knižní velkoobchod advised booksellers not to promote the book in any way. Unlike all other officially released titles their book was not even advertised in the weekly *Nové knihy* (New Books) or on the radio.¹⁷

The archives provide some information about the fate of Zikmund and Hanzelka's manuscript called *Cejlon – ráj bez andělů* (Ceylon – Paradise without the Angels) that was approved by Svoboda in March 1968 and planned for release on 1 December 1968, with an anticipated print run of 60 000, or up to 180 000 in the case of a second and third edition. The two travellers were among Svoboda's main authors, but they also apparently had a friendly and collegial relationship with the house's editors. Zikmund wrote to one editor in September 1968, opening it with the following, rather informal lines that ironically frame his perception of current events: "this is the first letter I am writing to you since August 20, that is to say, in normalisation times (or the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and as history went on)". In the letter he also referred to the slip proofs for *Světadíl pod Himalájem* that the house was supposed to deliver. He closed with the ironic note that, following GDR publishers, who had already withdrawn the contracts for translations of Zikmund and Hanzelka's books in the spring ("what foresight on their part!"), the Soviets were then also doing so, as "they don't need counter-revolutionary authors, do they". He added in brackets "in this connection, it occurred to me that you should change the street sign on the avenue where the famous Svoboda is located – perhaps into 'Counter-Revolutionary Avenue'". In a similarly informal fashion (in letters from October 1968 and January 1969) Hanzelka wrote to the same editor from Stockholm, where he briefly served as an attaché at the Czechoslovak Embassy, and in his letter he referred to the "current world of absurdities".

The openly anti-normalisation and informal discourse of these letters suggests that there was a great deal of trust and mutual

¹⁷ For the story surrounding this book, see "Jiří Hanzelka, Miroslav Zikmund - Život snů a skutečností," an account of their life and work accompanied by a detailed bibliography, at the official website of Zlín, the city where Zikmund lived for much of his life. See <http://zlin.cz/index.php?ID=2005> (accessed 30 October 2008).

understanding between the authors and their editors. It could also serve as yet further evidence of the fact that the process whereby official institutions were purged of all traces of 'undesirable' ideas and persons affiliated with the events of the late 1960s was gradual and only began widely affecting the cultural and intellectual scene in the early 1970s. On 9 March 1970, Zikmund and Hanzelka were sent a brief, ten-line letter signed by Svoboda's newly appointed director, which read as follows: "due to changes in the editorial profile of *Svoboda* publishing house we came to the conclusion that it will no longer be possible to publish your travel books here. As for your latest manuscript with the working title *Ceylon*, contracted on 28 February 1968 ... we are obliged to let you know that the manuscript was not delivered on time and thus we consider the contract to be invalid." In 1970 the authors wrote a series of letters defending themselves and outlining both the formal and factual shortcomings of the decision made by Svoboda's new management to stop publishing their books. One of their key arguments was that they had not been offered an extension for the delivery of the manuscript and they referred to their long-term agreement with the publisher to continuously release their work. There is even a letter dating from May 1970 written by the lawyer that the publishing house consulted with which points out that, according to the Author's Act, the house was indeed obliged to offer an extension of the date of submission. In further correspondence dating from June 1970 the house argued that to begin with there was no written and signed contract with the authors, just a record of a verbal agreement (the authors actually never referred to any contract, just to an 'agreement'), and as such the house is under no obligation to publish the authors' work. The story continued for years. At late as 1986, following a request based on a telephone conversation, the director of Svoboda sent a record of the case to the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in which he summarised the late submission and no contract arguments, and in order to underscore the unacceptability of the authors and their work he suggested that it "might be worth quoting from their letters", so he copied in the sarcastic lines about 'Counter-Revolutionary Avenue' and the 'normalisation Bronze Age' Zikmund had written in his informal letters to his editor in 1968.¹⁸

¹⁸ Miroslav Zikmund and Jiří Hanzelka, *Ceylon – ráj bez andělů* [Ceylon – Paradise without Angels] was released in the samizdat series Petlice in 1975. However, the respective files include evidences of the - rather ironic - closure of its story. In a

Other books experienced a similar fate. In some cases the title was simply withdrawn from the editorial process without any obvious explanation, in others a variety of arguments were used. For example, records on another translated title, *Murderers Among Us*, by Simon Wiesenthal, include copies of letters sent between 1968 and 1970 to the major state agency Dilia. While a letter from 5 February 1968 stated “we are very much interested in the book”, two years later (7 January 1970) the house wrote “we are no longer considering including it in our editorial plan”.¹⁹ A proposal to withdraw a biography of J. B. Tito contracted with Belgrade publishing house Kultura on 25 October 1968, was dated 1 October 1970. It explicitly stated that “due to significant political errors the book and its orientation do not conform with the current editorial objectives of the house”. Svoboda also had to write off the 47 780 Czechoslovak Crowns that had already been spent on translation, design, and print.²⁰ Even Russian titles had to go, such as a collection of poetry by a member of a “less-known avant-garde group” in Leningrad, which had been approved on 25 April 1968 and was withdrawn from production in September 1970 based on the argument that it “does not correspond with the current ideological and political needs” of the publisher.²¹ It was not uncommon to attempt to blame the author for the rejection, like in the case of a collection of Chinese stories edited by a renowned sinologist named Oldřich Král, who, after the 1968–1969 events, lost his post at Charles University and was banned from official publication until 1986. The records show that Svoboda’s editors initially used their favourite argument of late submission, and in this case allegedly the book proposal was late. When the author produced the proposal, it was not “of the appropriate length”

letter of 28 August 1989 Hanzelka informed Svoboda that, during his visit to Moscow in June, a Russian house offered to publish two translations of their older texts as well as the *Ceylon* book. He reminded Svoboda of the 1970 case, and noted that following the authors’ practice to first publish all their texts in Czech, they asked the “Moscow partners” (as he referred to them) to wait until the matter gets sorted at home. There is a draft (dated 8/11/1989) and a copy (dated 21/11/1989) of a letter inviting the authors to submit the manuscript with a promise to make a decision in six months time. Svoboda published the first edition of the book with a print run of 50 000 copies in 1991, i.e. at the time when the state-operated house was just about to face its own collapse.

¹⁹ The book was to be published under the title *Velitel hromadného vraždění* [The Leader of Mass Murder]. See NA, Ibid.; file “Velitel hromadného vraždění,” Box No. 86.

²⁰ See NA, Ibid.; file “Vilko Vinčelhalter,” Box No. 86.

²¹ See NA, Ibid.; file “Vvedenskij,” Box No. 86.

and the records of 1972 state rather blankly that the house withdrew from the project “due to its political obsolescence and also due to the political profile of the author”.²²

What these records all have in common is that, at least from an initial reading, it is not especially clear why the publication of the books had to be stopped. The ‘new editorial orientation’ of the house appears not to have been clearly articulated anywhere, and yet it was used frequently as an argument. Clearly, the involvement of authors or translators in the 1960s political thaw would have been an issue, even if, for example in Král’s case, the book, in this case an edited collection of stories from what was essentially a Communist-friendly Asian country, was not a problem. However, it would require a great deal of speculation to re-construct the real reasons for not publishing some of the other titles mentioned above. Would Wiesenthal’s or Hösse’s stories have offered an interpretation of the Holocaust different from that advocated by the newly installed communist leadership? Was Tito, who refused to join the Warsaw Pact invasion, no longer a politically acceptable figure? And what harm could a little-known Leningrad poet pose to readers? In other words, most of these seemingly ‘innocent’ titles could have at any point been considered as politically explosive. The criteria of inclusion or exclusion remained unwritten and as such could constantly be renegotiated case by case. Another important issue that emerges from these records is the manipulation of the misuse of time. Clearly many titles were still being approved and contracted up until late 1969, but a year or two years later they had to be rejected, even though some of them had already been printed and were ready for distribution. The financial losses must have been enormous, and again, only a system of centrally allocated resources, in which all the state houses operated, would make it possible for this kind of publishing economy not just to survive but to go on for another two decades.

It was also in 1970 that an intense media campaign was launched against ‘anti-socialist’ tendencies in publishing, especially literary publishing, and publishing houses were subject to (mostly fabricated) accusations of ideological and economic failures and commercial leanings.²³ Paradoxically, the successful economic performance of some

²² See NA, Ibid.; file “Výbor z čínských novel” [A Collection of Chinese Short Stories], Box No. 86. A proposal to write off the title, dated 16 September 1970; the final explanation quoted from a document of 11 December 1972.

²³ The leading vehicle of this campaign was the daily *Rudé právo*, which produced typical propaganda texts attacking not just publishers but all arts organisations for

publishing houses was construed as yet more evidence of their deviation from the model of 'socialist' publishing. The system of strictly allocating themes and genres to individual houses was reinstalled, and there were personnel purges, especially at the level of upper management. There emerged an extensive list—largely distributed orally and thus nowhere officially recorded—of 'unacceptable' authors and texts, along with a wide range of taboo themes and personalities, particularly anything associated with the events of the late 1960s. The media did their best to assist in making these names and topics taboo. For example, in 1970, the strongly pro-communist cultural and political journal *Tvorba* published a series of defamatory and sarcastic texts on some of the key figures of the cultural and intellectual scene in the late 1960s, accompanied by amateurish but offensive caricatures. The satirised figures included the Slovak fiction writer and journalist Ladislav Mňačko, described as "a political and literary castaway"; Ludvík Vaculík, whose novel *Sekyra* (The Axe) helped prepare "the destruction of socialist theory and practice"; the exiled journalist A. J. Liehm, who "not only departed from the Party but also betrayed his homeland and nation", or the above-mentioned traveller and journalist Miroslav Zikmund, who "never belonged to the Party to start with".²⁴

The first post-1968 Minister of Culture, Miloslav Brůžek, signed a piece of writing published in *Tvorba* that summarised, in a somewhat uncompromising tone, the future tasks of the 'consolidated' cultural policy.²⁵ The first and "most important" point raised for the area of literature was not (yet) the distinction between suitable and undesirable poets, but "to bring order back into the area of publishing and the book trade in all terms, i.e. normative, organisational, conceptual, and in terms of personnel". The Minister could not have been clearer in his outline of the local book's prospects: "we will guarantee unconditional state control over the publishing policy in the Czech lands in both the publishing houses and the book market. In this area we shall fully

their assumed profit-driven inclinations, characteristically titled "Za státní peníze proti státu" [For State Money against the State; 1 July 1970] or "Místo literatury protispolečenské pamflety" [Anti-social Pamphlets instead of Literature; 29 July 1970].

²⁴ These 'portraits' published in *Tvorba* (1970), were always placed on the highly visible back cover, and signed by Jan Sobotecký. See No. 23, p. 16 on Vaculík; No. 25, p. 16 on Liehm; No. 26, p. 16 on Mňačko and No. 28, p. 16 on Zikmund.

²⁵ Miloslav Brůžek, "Jak dále? Dvacet pět let vývoje české kultury," [What's Next? Twenty-five Years of Development of Czech Culture], *Tvorba* 33 (1970): 10.

restore the leading role of the state and its decisive influence on the further development of Czech book culture". He announced the establishment of a ministerial Editorial Board, whose task was to "ensure the consolidation of every sphere of Czech literature". He further stressed the role of a new system of financing 'socialistically engaged' literary production via the Czech Literary Fund, highlighted the 'new conceptualisation' of the editorial profile of the publishing house Československý spisovatel, and reported on the launch of new literary and cultural periodicals that would allow "writers and critics of all generations ... to discuss their views on socialist art". He also promised that 'a visible difference' in state policy would soon be in place, because, in contrast to the (restrictive) tasks of the first half of 1970, "we shall now focus more and more on positive measures". As future cultural and social developments would show, the difference between negative (restraining) and positive measures in culture was often blurred in practice.

The literary critic Jiří Hájek produced a seven-part series for *Tvorba* in which he offered a 'normalised' interpretation of the 'crisis' in domestic literature and society, and it was loaded with references to concrete people and institutions. He situated the beginning of the crisis as far back as 1956, when the "unprincipled cultural policy of the party" began to "hinder cultural development", and by "breaking the dikes" allowed "all the anti-socialist tendencies" to flourish. He stressed the role of the Writers' Union, which was to take credit for the fact "that all press and media soon after January [1968] drifted away from the influence of the Party and the socialist state".²⁶ This list of taboo topics and people, which even included translators and editors, continued to grow, especially in the early 1970s, and it largely matched the lists of books to be removed from the libraries that were issued regularly from 1972.²⁷ But the list was never fixed, and it would grow to include the names of the many intellectuals who went into exile (e.g. Kundera) or went underground (e.g. Havel) or would shrink when

²⁶ Jiří Hájek, "A co literatura?" [What about Literature?] *Tvorba* (1970), Nos. 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50–51. Quoted from No. 47, p. 13 and No. 44, p. 5.

²⁷ For a completed list of based on the guidelines for the 'special collection' in libraries issued by the Ministry of Culture on 31 May 1972 (No. 9695/72) and the list of prohibited publications of the 1950s see *Čtenář* 42/2, 3, 4 (1990), 1–6; 9–16; 17–22. For more details regarding the fate of particular titles in the context of the publishing policy of the 1970s and 1980s, see "Nakladatelství" in P. Janoušek (2007), Vol. 4, and J. Halada (2007).

some famous literati made a comeback and became acceptable again (e.g. Bohumil Hrabal, Miroslav Holub, Jiří Šotola) and when the nature of the publishing system became more relaxed in the late 1980s.

Given the role that intellectuals and fiction writers played in the late 1960s, it was the release and interpretation of fiction texts in particular that were surrounded by controversy. An exemplary case of such disputes can be found in Československý spisovatel's files on Jiří Šotola (1924–1989), a poet, fiction writer, and film and TV screen writer who was intensely involved with the 1960s liberalisation movement and was consequently banned from publishing after 1970.²⁸ While both internal and external reviewers appreciated the imaginative narrative style and generally innovative structural qualities of his novels, their concerns about the potential 'oppositional reading' of the texts (to use Hall's and Morley's terms) are worth noting.²⁹ One of the reviewers considered Šotola's novel *Kuře na rožni* (Chicken on a Spit, 1976) – the story of a puppeteer, situated in the time of the Napoleonic wars—to be “a leading text of contemporary Czech historical fiction due to its stylistic as well as ideological value”. Another one, however, wondered if the main character's opinions are limited to the time and space within the given story, or if they could be seen as ‘absolute judgements’, and he also noted that “there is always going to be a group of readers who seek meanings that the text does not contain and no author can prevent that from happening”.

A nearly paranoid concern with the potential interpretation of a text even before it reached its audience was a typical feature of publishing strategies in the two decades after 1968. A reviewer of another novel, *Svatý na mostě* (Saint on the Bridge, 1978), a semi-fictional portrait of St. John of Nepomuk set in pre-Hussite Bohemia, appreciated the

²⁸ Only following a public denunciation of his previous work in *Literární noviny* (an intellectual platform of the Prague Spring activists) and in the Union of Czechoslovak Writers during the second half of the 1960s, published in the communist weekly *Tvorba* in 1975, his manuscripts began to be considered again for publication. See “Jiří Šotola” in Pavel Janoušek et al., *Slovník českých spisovatelů od roku 1945* [Dictionary of Czech Fiction Writers since 1945], Vol. 2, (Prague: Brána, Knižní klub, 1998), 499–501.

²⁹ See editorial records of *Kuře na rožni* [Chicken on a Spit], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1976); *Svatý na mostě* [Saint on the Bridge], (Prague: ČS, 1978); *Osmáct Jeruzalémů* [Eighteen Jerusalems] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986). All the citations are from the Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví [LAPNP - Literary Archive of the Muzeum of Czech Literature], location Zámek Staré Hradky, file “Československý spisovatel,” – “Jiří Šotola”.

“anti-clerical, anti-dogmatic and materialistic” nature of the novel and saw it as “a sharp indictment of the secular and clerical powers”. Nonetheless, he also somewhat cryptically noted that “precisely because this is a text that criticises a particular social structure, and precisely because we have just experienced a social crisis in recent years, but also for other personal reasons ... there will be some interpreters who will try to deduce what is not in the text from what there is, and vice versa”. The reviewer even cited specific sentences where “the author could have unintentionally put the augury art in motion” as he poetically referred to it, and argued that the writer “holds a great deal of responsibility – he has to make sure that there are as few (unwanted) interpreters as possible and that all of them are mistaken”. In a letter to the editor-in-chief he pursued the matter further: “I am not a seeker of double meanings, [but] because I know that some readers will be looking for them, ... I had to draw your attention to them.” Similarly, another reviewer referred to a novel called *Osmáct Jeruzalému* (Eighteen Jerusalems, 1986), an apocalyptic story of a children’s crusade, as a “denouncement of clerical dogmatism”. But she also took the opportunity “to call attention to page 198 where the discussion with one boy who returned (from the crusade) could possibly be perceived in a generalised sense that goes beyond the actual story”. In the concluding part of the novel she observed that “the degree of pessimism is perhaps way too high”.

The lack of transparency and the seemingly unlimited changes to the list of prohibited or potentially ‘harmful’ works, authors and topics further reinforced the strong mechanisms of self-control exercised by authors, editors, and external reviewers of manuscripts. A set of largely unpredictable institutional mechanisms was established that could prevent a title or an author from reaching the public. The above examples of Svoboda’s practices showed that such mechanisms included putting restrictions on the distribution of a text; shipping the entire print run directly to the central warehouse and releasing the book several years later; and minimising or omitting any form of promotion of the book. Another effective tool to reduce the impact of a text on the wider population was prohibiting its review in the official print media. A title could also be silenced by releasing just a fraction of the initially announced print run.³⁰ All the features of the centrally controlled book

³⁰ For one example of the complex journey of a book (the translation of Joyce’s *Ulysses*) to the reader, see Robert Hardy, “Joyce Meets Kafka – ‘A Prague Odyssey’”, in

production familiar from the period before 1968, including the discrepancy between centrally controlled production and distribution and the actual readers' demand, the allocation of paper just to politically acceptable titles, and the shortage of efficient printing capacities experienced a comeback in the 1970s.

In this system a key factor shaping the relationship between readers and books was time, or more precisely, the greater amount of time needed for a book to actually reach the reader. Leaving aside the complicated initial stage of commissioning a work and getting a manuscript approved by the respective authorities at the ministerial and Party levels, every publishing house put together an editorial plan that included a preliminary estimate of print runs, and these were submitted for approval to the Publishing Division of the Ministry of Culture, which, together with the Ministry headquarters, allocated the amount of paper each house received in accordance with directives issued by the Ministry of Industry. Publishers offered the approved titles to the state booksellers in *Co nového vyjde* (CNV – What's New in Print), a simple bulletin, just several A4 pages in length, that contained information on each title, but no visual images of the books. Here is an excerpt from one such blurb, which includes the recommended pronunciation of the author's name and a description loaded with meaning: "*Remarque* (read *Remark*), *E.M.*, *Black Obelisk*, 3rd edition. The novel describes German society at a time when the Weimar Republic is emerging out of the defeat of 1918, and when Nazi fighting troops are walking through the streets of German cities. This society is galloping towards catastrophe, but the author grants his characters a sharp wit that helps them to survive"³¹

Guided by the sparse information in these short texts, booksellers were then supposed to place their orders at a district division of the state distribution company Kniha and the order would be sent to the state wholesaler Knižní velkoobchod, which then passed it on to the publisher. This does not mean that the books were printed on the basis of the number of books ordered, for it was the publisher who was supposed to make the final decision about the print run of a particular

Censorship and Political Communication in Eastern Europe, ed. George Schopflin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 24–26.

³¹ CNV, *Měsíční nabídkový bulletin* 6-01 [CNV, Monthly Bulletin of Books on Offer], (1986), 27. Intended for the internal use of staff members of publishing houses and within the book trade only.

title, taking into account the amount of allocated paper available. Order numbers on the demand side and the supply side of this process would not necessarily have matched and in fact often did not. In this planning phase, a number of barriers were set up as mechanisms of indirect regulation of the relationship between the producers and the consumers of books. This complicated chain of institutional stages created room for deliberate intervention by an individual or institution to delay or halt publication of any title branded as undesirable. In addition, a title used to be 'advertised' in the *CNV* bulletin for one or two years prior to its actual release. Thus, for example, the Czech translation of Claude Simon's *Histoire* went into distribution in March 1986 with a print run of 6000, but it was first announced in the *CNV* bulletin in April 1984.³² In the autumn of 1985, Claude Simon won the Nobel Prize for literature, which generated greater interest in his work all over the world, including Czechoslovakia. Despite the dubious view the communist cultural authorities took of this award – often portrayed as yet another tool of Western imperialistic propaganda – the Nobel Prize usually did receive some attention from the local media and consequently also from readers. In the standard conditions of a commercial book market the high public visibility that prestigious awards like the Nobel Prize generate tends to support sales and makes the book market more dynamic. In the command system, however, an increased but unplanned for demand from readers just generated shortages and served as yet another mechanism of destabilisation of the centrally regulated system of book supply.

The time issue can be traced in the book production records of the publishers, too. While the content of the text mattered, as ideologically desirable texts and single-author titles took relatively less time to produce, we find that generally over the years there was a gradual increase in the amount of time between the approval of a text and its actual release for all genres and topics. If the production process took approximately two or three years in the 1960s, from the mid-1970s, by the 1980s it had increased to a period of up to six or more years. Production time seemed to speed up significantly particularly during the mid- and late 1960s. For example, in July 1964 a publishing house's senior management approved a book by Czech academics on contemporary Western philosophy and that book went into distribution in

³² Claude Simon, *Příběh* [Story], (Prague: Odeon, 1985).

September 1965; a book on Norway was approved in February 1965 and distributed in March 1967; and a translated book on public opinion research methods was approved in January 1966 and released at the beginning of 1968.³³ In the early 1970s, a text on Chinese history translated from Russian, the production of which involved securing translations, copyright contracts (via the state agency Dilia), a complex set of illustrations, and an index, took just two years to produce (1972–1974).³⁴ While there were some exceptions – for instance, the quick publication of a collection of testimonies by activists in the collectivisation of agricultural land – by the second half of the mid-1970s the production time was generally increasing³⁵ to the extent that even a collection of essays on the USSR by Zdeněk Nejedlý, a key Party official writing on a topic of unquestionable ideological value to the regime, which was approved on 14 July 1975 and had a contracted date of submission for 30 September 1976, was not published until 28 April 1978. A book on the history of Africa, the production of which was certainly complicated, as it had several authors, contained photographs, and was re-contracted several times, saw six years pass between the date of its approval by senior management (24 August 1981) and its release into distribution (February 1987). A book on Norway published in the 1980s was approved in November 1983 and released in July 1988.³⁶

A noteworthy trend relating to time is how Svoboda, for example, articulated production time in its book contracts over the years. Although the contracts seem to be more or less standardised in form, slightly adapted for each individual title, they also contain some seemingly minor variations. The text of the contract always included the latest expected date by which the publisher was obliged to publish the

³³ Jakub Netopilík and Miloslav Kubeš, *Kritika současné buržoazní filosofie* [Critique of Contemporary Bourgeois Philosophy], (Prague: NPL, 1965); Josef Fabík, *Norsko* [Norway], (Prague: Svoboda, 1967); Elisabeth Noelle, *Výzkum veřejného mínění: Úvod do metod demoskopie* [Public Opinion Research: Introduction to the Methods of Demoscopy], (Prague: Svoboda, 1968). See NA, “ÚV KSČ Svoboda: Neje-Not,” Box No. 46; files “Netopilík, Jakub,” “Norsko,” “Noelle, Elisabeth”.

³⁴ *Nejnovější dějiny Číny 1917–1970* [The Newest History of China], (Prague: Svoboda, 1974). For the production records see NA, “ÚV KSČ Svoboda: Neje-Not,” Box No. 46; file “Nejnovější dějiny Číny”.

³⁵ See, for example, Věra Holá, et al., eds., *Neobyčejná doba: Vzpomínky průkopníků socialistického zemědělství* [Exceptional Times: Memories of the Pioneers of Socialist Agriculture], Prague: Svoboda, 1980. See NA, “ÚV KSČ Svoboda: Neje-Not,” Box No. 46; file “Neobyčejná doba”.

³⁶ Jan Frýba, *Norské království* [Kingdom of Norway], (Prague: Svoboda, 1988). See NA, “ÚV KSČ Svoboda: Neje-Not,” Box No. 46; file “Norské království”.

book, but it also had a note stating that should 'serious circumstances' arise, the date could be up to two years longer. Contracts up until 1977 also included a sentence suggesting that if the book was still not published by the end of that two-year period, the author or translator "has a right to back out of the contract". Nonetheless, starting in at least 1978, that additional note about the author's right to withdraw if the publisher failed to meet the contracted date was left out, and this practice remained in place throughout the 1980s. The length of time it took to produce a book became an even more pressing issue in the second half of the 1980s, when book production fell behind the pace of historical development in the Gorbachev era, so that by the time a political title was ready for release it was already politically out of date. During this period, the files of unpublished titles in the archives of publishing houses began to fill with political titles of Soviet origin. Even Svoboda backed out of publishing a translation of a Party propaganda manual that was approved for publication in October 1984 and planned for release in 1987, arguing that "now, after the 27th Congress of the CPUS, the content of this work is obsolete".³⁷ In some cases the Soviet partners themselves intervened in order to stop Svoboda from translating outdated Russian texts. As one letter stated, "during a meeting that Svoboda's editor-in-chief held in Moscow in June 1987, the headquarters of the publishing house Mysl' recommended that we withdraw from publishing this title".³⁸

The issues of time and of print runs unresponsive to readers' demands and eventually even to the dynamics of political events were closely related to another matter that arose already in the 1950s – the stock, storage and sale of books. The centrally controlled book trade actually adopted some market-oriented principles even before 1989. For example, a bookseller was penalised for storing an inventory of books for more than 180 days, and his or her salary partially depended on sales. A book defined as 'successful' would have sold out in two weeks. Since the 180-day requirement was often impossible to meet in

³⁷ A copy of a letter of the director of Svoboda to Dilia, dated 11/3/1987, in NA, Ibid.; file "Vinogradov," Box No. 86. The unpublished text was entitled *Pedagogika v praxi stranického propagandisty* [Pedagogy in the Practice of a Party Propagandist].

³⁸ A copy of a letter to the agency Delia, dated 10/2/1987, in NA, Ibid.; file "Vinogradov," Box No. 86. A title by the same author *Zákonitosti rozvoje marxisticko-leninské strany* [Patterns of Development of the Marxist-Leninist Party] was originally published in Russian in 1983, contracted with Dilia for translation and approved by the house editorial board in 1985, with an expected date of publication 1986–1987.

many cases, exceptions to the rules were instituted and a list of books exempt from such penalties was issued, which included, for example, classic national literary works from the 19th and 20th centuries. The physical space in which books were sold and purchased was an issue in itself. It may be hard to imagine now, with the soft carpets and open bookshelves of major European bookstore chains within easy reach, what it was like to shop for books in Old Town Prague during the 1980s. The very first self-service bookshop in Prague that allowed shoppers to browse the bookshelves was opened back in 1906 by the prominent publisher František Topič.³⁹ But under the centrally controlled system books were sold over the counter until the late 1980s. Books were sold the same way bread was, and buyers had very limited physical contact with the volumes until they purchased them. In order to look inside a book, the buyer had to ask the salesperson to retrieve it and hand it over, and thus the salesperson's body and the shop counter represented yet another – physical and symbolic – barrier between the book and the reader, between the customer and the product. On days when titles in particularly high demand were released some well-known Prague bookstores even sold the books in pre-wrapped packages, and customers paid for them without even unwrapping the paper. While the argument could be made that anyone who buys books from Amazon does not get a look at the book until it arrives and is unwrapped, but at least the buyer voluntarily selects a particular book in advance. In this case, however, even if one had never heard of the particular title or its author, the very existence of a queue could have been interpreted as a guarantee of the book's 'value' and thus seen as something worth getting. The queue and the people leaving the shop with packages in their hands served as a unique and impromptu form of advertising.

It was not just the planned book economy, but even a kind of mentality of deprivation, that led people to accumulate things and made them desire and ultimately buy even those items and books that they may not have really needed or wanted when they were buying them. Whether it was a roll of toilet paper or a book, the very appearance of people queued up in front of a shop generated a sense of an anticipated shortage of the particular item(s). Given the constant shortage of books, or, more precisely, of the books readers actually wanted,

³⁹ Jan Halada, *Člověk a kniha* [People and Books], (Prague: Universita Karlova, 1993), 70.

particular volumes were allocated to book-buyers rather than sold in the traditional sense (though of course they still had to pay for them). It is a question to what extent one can talk about 'sales' and 'selection' in an environment supposedly free of commercial pressures. What book-buying was mainly about then – at least from the perspective of the consumer – was securing access to the sources of allocation, that is, to the people in charge of allocation, and this could take various forms, including making friends with and/or corrupting a local bookseller. The system of allocation was further facilitated by 'book Thursdays', the weekday on which new titles were regularly released, after having first been announced in a weekly bulletin *Nové knihy* (New Books). A typical image in towns and cities all over the country every Thursday was the crowds lined up outside the bookstores, many of whom were waiting there from 5 am or earlier.⁴⁰ The pressure of the demand from book readers/consumers contributed to the gradual development of a combination of over-the-counter and under-the-counter sales, and the book business saw the emergence of its own shadow economy and black market, like virtually every other area of national production and consumption.

One of the most noticeable residua of market principles, which survived even in the environment of an otherwise centralised system of book distribution and sales, was the used bookstore, referred to in Czech as *Antikvariát*. This type of bookstore differed from the usual state shops in one important respect – customers were able to browse, search for, and touch the books. Typically dark and dusty with the magical smell of old books, the *Antikvariát* actually represented an alternative institution. Its alternative nature derived not just from the stereotypical appearance of the bookseller: usually a somewhat wild-looking guy of indeterminate age, with a beard and long hair capping off a well-preserved hippie style, straight out of the 1960s. These shops often attracted informal networks of people with direct and/or indirect ties to alternative cultural circles, including the literary and intellectual underground. The *Antikvariát's* finances were to some extent 'alternative', too. Unlike regular state bookshops, the booksellers themselves both bought books from individual customers and sold them in the shop. Even though each store had a planned and controlled

⁴⁰ Despite an attempt to prevent this study from becoming yet another piece of the "memoirs of an Eastern European intellectual", as one reader of its first version pointed out, this information is indeed purely based on my personal observation.

budget for purchases, they enjoyed a certain level of independence and responsibility.

For example, Václav Prošek, the manager and later co-owner of one famous Prague used bookstore, noted in 1991 that the kind of titles the store used to buy in the past largely depended on the person running the store. The state distribution company Kniha, the umbrella institution under which all bookstores in the country operated prior to 1989, used to employ a special instructor whose major task was to ideologically supervise used bookstores, and it also issued guidelines for used booksellers to trace books expelled from libraries. However, this only worked in theory not practice. For the most part used bookstore staff applied their own censorship, which, as time went by, became weaker and weaker as the autonomy of the store became stronger. Unlike in the new book stores, which only sold books with fixed prices printed on the cover page, there was no controlled pricing system in used bookstores – the manager just had to set the price of the old books on sale at a level where he avoided making too much of a profit, as then the turnover centrally assigned to each store would be increased, but also did not make too little, for otherwise the staff would get no bonuses.⁴¹

The best finds were largely diverted into a secondary system of distribution through informal circles of friends and colleagues, but that did not rule out the possibility of a customer striking luck and making an unbelievably valuable find. It was not every day that a customer fished a grubby, cheap, thin paperback volume of verses out of a banana box – a common way of storing the cheapest books on sale – only to discover that it was a first edition of one of the cornerstones of modern Czech literature, like Karel Hynek Mácha's *Máj* (May), published in 1836, but the anticipation of such discoveries was always present. Just the fact of being surrounded by piles of books outside the system of central planning and control was an exciting experience, but the hope of finding something unexpected and unpredictable turned every visit to the *Antikvariát* into a major adventure. Thus, for example, in the 1980s it was still possible in an *Antikvariát* to find books produced in the 1960s that had been banned from local libraries since the early 1970s. It was also possible to find books, periodicals, and black-and-white

⁴¹ Václav Prošek, "Soukromý antikvář," [A Private Used Bookseller], *Literární noviny* 2/20 (16 May 1991): 7. (As a supplement of *Lidové noviny* 4/113, 16 May 1991.)

postcards from the pre-war era, valuable prints and lithographs by artists who had fallen out of favour or even collections of maps from the Habsburg period or incunabula and medieval manuscripts. Although some level of control was exercised over the activities of these shops, they played a key institutional role as depositories of book cultures from the past and thus as a source of continuity. As Prošek himself stressed, the reason that he and his colleagues wanted to be independent was not so much ideological as it was economic and psychological. The state company Kniha continued to be overloaded with (new) books and so it tried to prevent the used bookstores from buying more books. The *Antikvariát's* independence after 1989 helped them to evade the control of the central wholesale company and the restriction it used to impose upon their own business. In 1991 Prošek noted that "the profession as such had nothing to do with socialism. We continue to work as we used to before, only we enjoy it more now".⁴²

The performed consistency of the centrally controlled system was constantly challenged and undermined, not only from the side of oppositional textual production (samizdat production and exiled publishers), but also from within the system of official publishing and distribution. One of the key challenges was at the reception end, book buyers and readers, those who were the main targets of the command system of book production in the first place. Like in the other Eastern bloc countries, several projects that focused on the actual impact and achievements of centralised institutional practices in Czech publishing were conducted by the research department on reading at the National Library (formerly the State Library) in Prague. One project involved the pooling of data on the reading preferences and habits of individuals collected in thirty public libraries in three stages between 1982 and 1988. It was not until the early 1990s, though, that one of the leaders of this research, Aleš Haman, was able to present the results publicly in a book, in which he essentially concluded that the nearly fifty years of

⁴² Ibid., 7. Almost no scholarly attention has yet been devoted to this exceptional phenomenon and its social dynamics within the context of 'totalitarian' culture. The few accounts that have been produced locally are more autobiographical in nature, and these issues thus still await further analyses. See Luděk Svoboda, "Antikvariát a já," [The Used Bookstore and Me], (Prague: ADplus, 1999); a collection of notes and memoirs by Prague used booksellers (J. Placák, V. Zadrobílek, V. Třešňák, T. Hrubá, Z. Hejda) compiled by Zuzana Děřátková, "Náhradní povolání: antikvář. (O antikvariátech v sedmdesátých letech)," [Substitute Occupation: Bookseller in a Used Bookstore] *Revolver Revue* 33 (1997): 164–194.

attempts at installing a command system of book production and reception had generated counter-productive effects.⁴³

What library readers in the 1980s were least interested in were novels on various socially sensitive themes connected with the working class and driven by the imperatives of Socialist Realism. Haman noted that the negative attitudes towards such texts were the consequence of the huge number of translations of contemporary Soviet literature on such topics.⁴⁴ While these Soviet imports certainly played an important role in producing an allergic reaction from readers to this type of literature, it was also the local overproduction of texts of similar content and form that significantly contributed to the negative perception of this genre. The most frequently borrowed titles from libraries were memoirs, biographies, and psychological and historical fiction, while novels portraying life in contemporary Western society were the favourites. What Czech library-goers enjoyed most of all during the 1980s were books of a relaxing and popular nature, or, in other words, escapist literature. What they largely ignored were the more 'demanding' literary works, both classics and contemporary, and literature focusing on current issues. Using data on book borrowing, researchers at the National Library compiled a list of authors and divided them into two groups: 'read authors' and 'unread authors'. Among the most read authors, 56% were Czech, 15.7% were American, 11% were British, and only 1% Russian. In the unread group, 29.3% were Czech authors, 28.3% Russian, and just 6% were American.⁴⁵ The researchers calculated the 'rate of reader activity' on the basis of the ratio between read and unread authors. While North American, British and Czech authors were among those that readers rated highest, Russian and Soviet authors received the least attention from readers. A similar scale was created for the national origin of individual titles, based on an analysis of records of 18 000 checked-out books. The most frequently borrowed books were Czech titles (55%) followed by translations of American (16%) and British literature (10%). The list of unread titles was yet again topped by translations of Russian and Soviet works (34%), the second-least read titles were Czech (21.2%), and third place was occupied by translations from German and French (6%).⁴⁶

⁴³ Aleš Haman, *Literatura z pohledu čtenářů* [Literature from the Perspective of Readers], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1991).

⁴⁴ A. Haman (1991), 108.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

These data were completed at a time when some Soviet authors, such as Mikhail Bulgakov, Chinghiz Aitmatov, or Vasily Shukshin, to name a few, were not only being published in substantial print runs, but were also very popular among Czech intellectuals.⁴⁷ However, according to Haman's surveys, the 'common' Czech library reader did not share this enthusiasm for what were generally defined as 'Russian' texts. Haman concluded in a dramatic tone that "despite all the attempts to rape culture, the 'normalisers' have not succeeded at imposing their intentions on readers".⁴⁸ Clearly, the applicability of Haman's interpretation of the 'subversive' tendencies on the side of the reception of command book production is to some extent lessened by the late date of publication of his research results, which was a few years after the system he analysed had already disappeared. Moreover, as Haman himself noted, these surveys were only able to cover a very limited sample of the population, as the category of 'library users' could not take in "'extreme' forms (of reading) such as readers focused on the non-official production, samizdat and exile literature circulating among particular groups of inhabitants". Nor could it include those individuals who would have qualified as 'non-readers'.⁴⁹ It need not be stressed that supporting research on 'samizdat readership' would have been out of the question in Czechoslovakia during the 1980s, and Haman's team can hardly be blamed for not including this category in their projects. As a result, there are no empirical data on that form of reading material, but while there were certainly groups of readers who had had limited or nearly no access to alternative textual production, 'library readers' and 'extreme forms of reading' in actual reading practice were to some extent overlapping categories. Nevertheless, even these limited surveys revealed the tendencies in book reception that challenged the objectives of the cultural policy of the command system.

Potentially disturbing tendencies were already being identified in research projects on reading in the early 1970s. For example, a project coordinated by Vladimír Hepner attempted to determine the factors

⁴⁷ Needless to say, their work enabled numerous alternative interpretations, not only owing to the clearly powerful narrative skills of these authors, but also owing to their reputation, which included continuing conflicts with the Soviet regime. Aitmatov's famous novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* was released in Czech in three editions between 1981 and 1983, with over 10 000 copies published in total, and just the first edition of a collection of Shukshin's short stories came out in 1987 in a print run of 18 500.

⁴⁸ A. Haman (1991), 124.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

that were likely to influence the Czech population's reading and book-buying preferences.⁵⁰ The researchers concluded that some of the most influential factors determining what books people bought were personal recommendations from friends (70% of respondents), borrowing books from friends' libraries, and the books that were already in the family library. The authors of the study did not fail to note that while 60% of the sample of the Czech population claimed 'to have bought at least one book recently', a comparable French survey revealed that 51% of the population did not buy books at all, and 46% of West Germans could not remember when they last bought a book.⁵¹ Common Czech readers evidently considered it particularly important to have a family library, as, according to Hepner's data, 50% of the respondents claimed to have a library with more than 100 books.⁵² Haman's data from the 1980s give an even higher figure: 54.8% respondents of his sample claimed to have a library with more than 500 books, while just 0.8% indicated they owned no books at all.⁵³ What neither Haman nor Hepner noted was that family libraries were often the only institution that guaranteed the circulation of the genres, titles, and authors that there were shortages of under the centrally controlled system. As such, the bookshelves in a person's living room served as a medium of literary, cultural, and intellectual continuity. That role would have been especially great during the normalisation period, when home libraries became the depositories for books published during the 1960s and not reprinted for nearly twenty years, and for texts produced in the 'alternative' spheres of samizdat and exile publishing. But private libraries cannot be viewed exclusively as cradles of resistance and opposition. Instead of stocking subversive anti-communist texts, most family libraries would also have supplied their owners and their acquaintances with thrillers, trashy romances, and action stories, which were also largely unavailable in the local book market.

⁵⁰ Vladimír Hepner et al., *Průzkum postojů české veřejnosti ke knize a k jejímu šíření* [A Survey of the Attitudes of the Czech Public towards Books and Their Dissemination], (Prague: ÚVK, 1975).

⁵¹ Ibid., 79, 80. In reference to "Kniha a čtenář ve Francii. Studie Cercle Nationale des éditeurs, Paris," [Books and Readers in France. A Study by Cercle Nationale des éditeurs, Paris] in *Výchova a vzdělávání dospělých. Informační bulletin*. No. 5 (Prague: FSVP UK, 1969), 152; *Buch und Leser in Deutschland. Eine Untersuchung des DIVO-Instituts, Frankfurt a.M.*, eds. Maria-Rita Girardi, Lothar Karl Neffe und Herbert Steiner (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1965), 240.

⁵² Ibid., 83.

⁵³ A. Haman (1991), 60.

In order to demonstrate the “high cultural standards of our population”, Hepner made a comparison with data from abroad. Having left aside the methodological background of the foreign projects and the question of the compatibility of his data with international data, Hepner noted, for example, that in Western Germany, “only 13% of the population had more than 100 books at home” in 1964, and “just 45% of the population possessed more than 40 books” in the Netherlands in 1960. However, “in our country, more than 70% of people have over 50 books” in their family libraries.⁵⁴ In addition, 54% of Czech respondents could be classified as ‘regular readers,’ people who read more than ten books a year, and Haman’s sample of library users scored even higher: 60% of his respondents were reading two to four fiction books a month.⁵⁵ Hepner did not fail to add that 58% of French do not read books at all, and 64% Germans claimed they had not read a single book in the past four weeks.⁵⁶ The discourse of Hepner’s research report is dominated by proud references to the highly cultured nature of the local population, which especially stands out in comparison with other, mainly West European countries. To what extent were the intense reading habits and large family libraries really an expression of the traditional ‘national love for books’ (a touching explanation that was also noted by Huláková)? Were the packed bookshelves in family living rooms simply a consequence of the fact that Czechs hate throwing books out? Were they the result of communist pro-reading propaganda? Or were they a reflection of a certain kind of escapism, through which people made up for the lack of satisfying things for them to do in their public lives, which was dominated by the ‘oppressive’ regime? Or was the obsession with books a kind of consumer counter-reaction to the shortage of desirable goods on the market; in other words, were they just stocking up with books in expectation of a shortage, just as they would stock up on toilet paper and sanitary napkins – ‘just in case’?

Some of these questions may simply not have a definite answer at all. But it is worth noting here that, as in the case of Soviet reading research, multiple layers of meanings could be traced beneath even such a seemingly neutral research topic as the reading habits of the local population and beneath the bombastic rhetoric that tended to accompany the

⁵⁴ V. Hepner (1975), 83.

⁵⁵ A. Haman (1991), 58.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

presentation of research results. Even the most modest research reports would have included points and conclusions that could be viewed as potentially disturbing – at least from the perspective of the ruling regime – signals of failures of the command system. It was mostly centrally controlled book production that supplied reading matter to the majority of the population and to family libraries.

Despite the librarians' struggle for a 'New Man' of the 1950s, the private libraries served a key and multifaceted socio-cultural role. Not only were they depositories of books produced during relatively liberal periods of the communist era and of course during the periods that preceded it, they were also mirrors of the individual tastes of their owners. They represented the key role of the private sphere in selecting and acquiring books for reading, the role of the sphere outside and beyond public and official control. While the size of family libraries was often depicted as yet further evidence of the achievements of 'advanced socialism', they could have served as another challenge to the original intentions of the centrally controlled system. As Hepner stated, "a considerable part of the population does not seem to be influenced directly by any book propaganda, but rather by mediators in informal as well as formal groups".⁵⁷

With regard to the institutionalised form of a pre-selected book supply, like that offered by public libraries, they were "mostly used by respondents with the lowest level of education, which means that libraries are fulfilling an important cultural and educational function particularly in relation to these, often, in terms of reading choices indecisive, groups of population".⁵⁸ These social characteristics of the majority of library visitors could to some extent also explain Haman's research results using data from the 1980s, concerning the predominantly 'lighter' nature of the texts most frequently borrowed at public libraries. Apparently, it was not just the – to some extent 'extreme' – readers of samizdat publications that did not use official public libraries as the main supplier of their reading, but also members of society with higher education. As Hepner noted, "for people with a university degree (...) the public library is the relatively least used resource of reading material".⁵⁹ What must also be considered here is the specific cultural and political context of the early 1970s when Hepner's research

⁵⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 81.

was conducted, a context that he chose – for understandable reasons – to exclude from his discussion.⁶⁰ As materials from the publishers' archives clearly show, the early 1970s were a turning point, when the echoes of relatively liberal publishing policy in the late 1960s were still in place, and at least some titles contracted during this period had still a chance to reach the bookstores, but were gradually being replaced with the normalisation of both the book market and library collections. That environment put more pressure on books, as a special object of public attention, and may also have had an impact on the answers of Hepner's respondents and on their ideas about what kind of answers they might be expected or even required to give.

Without overestimating their social significance, books seem to have been part of a more general trend that characterised late socialist society. Not only those who played the roles of officially approved authors, editors, binders, or booksellers, but even 'common' readers (however vague this category may be) were accumulating symbolic and social capital, and that certainly included reading and buying books. And it was the capital accumulated in what Šiklová called the 'grey zone' and Havel called the 'first culture' that was to become one of the key driving forces behind the Velvet Revolution and the following 'transition'. Paradoxically, the more skilful, competent, and qualified the performers that the regime produced, the more fit and ready they were to potentially pull the mask off the regime of which they were a product and contribute to its demise. Even the activists of anti-communist dissent themselves acknowledged this paradox. As one member of anti-Soviet oppositional circles admitted, "I was a completely harmless member of society. It is the young people, those who display a serious interest in the theoretical foundations of communism and begin immersing themselves in Marx, Lenin and Stalin, who pose a much greater danger to the regime. The Soviet authorities realise this. A person who takes theory seriously will, sooner or later, begin comparing it with practice, and will end up rejecting one or the other, and, later on, the two of them together".⁶¹ Thus it could be argued that both the social forces explicitly in opposition to the system and the internal

⁶⁰ The research was conducted by means of interviews with 1331 respondents in December 1971.

⁶¹ By the Soviet dissident Vladimir Voinovich, *The Anti-Soviet Soviet Union*, transl. Richard Lourie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 147; quoted in J.C. Scott (1990), 106.

pressures generated from within and by the system played a role in its final collapse and in what was to come after.

In my previous work on related topics I referred to the ‘performative’ nature of the social and cultural practices of ‘normalisation’ in the 1980s.⁶² These ‘performative’ principles, which could be identified in a variety of areas of everyday life during this period and thus can by no means be limited to just the sphere of book production and reception, deserve some conceptual clarification. As Darnton reminds us, while a focus on the issues of representation and discourse surely cannot compensate for a lack of empirical evidence, the conceptual apparatus used in order to narrate the story of a particular system or a set of events tends to be an integral part of the construction of the system as such. I would add that such a constructive tendency has to be taken into account especially when dealing with stories narrated by the participants in that system. An important and today almost canonical story, with powerful explanatory and constructive potential, is Václav Havel’s story of the greengrocer. In his famous essay “The Power of the Powerless” Havel follows an imaginary greengrocer, who places in his shop window, among the onions and carrots, posters with ‘politically correct’ slogans he does not believe in.⁶³ For Havel, this man, and all those who pass his shop window without even noticing the slogans any more because they may have similar ones hanging in their own offices, is a player in the game that reproduces the world of appearances.

It is “by accepting the prescribed *ritual*, by accepting appearances as reality, by accepting the given rules of the game” that he and his co-citizens declare their loyalty to a regime they may not necessarily agree with. By taking part in such game they “make it possible for the game to go on, for it to exist in the first place.”⁶⁴ Together they have all adapted to the conditions in which they live, but in doing so they help create those conditions and are thus “both victims of the system and its instruments”⁶⁵. This discussion of everyday life under the ‘old regime’

⁶² J. Šmejkalová (1994), 202–203.

⁶³ The essay, written in 1978, is available in two English translations: Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *Living in Truth*, ed. Jan Vladislav (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986); and Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965–1990* ed. and transl. Paul Wilson (NY: Vintage Books, 1992). For the latest Czech edition, see Václav Havel, *Spisy. 4. Eseje a jiné texty z let 1970–1989. Dálkový výslech*, ed. Jan Šulc (Prague: Torst, 1999).

⁶⁴ V. Havel (1986), 45, 46.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 51, 52.

allows Havel to conceptualise what he calls the ‘post-totalitarian system’. The principles by which Havel defines this system could be interpreted as performative, for they are based on the “world of appearances, a mere ritual, a formalized language deprived of semantic contact with reality and transformed into a system of ritual signs that replace reality with pseudo-reality”.⁶⁶ This definition enables Havel to identify how all the members of the community participate in the automatism of the system, and consequently to move beyond simplified models of “individualised autonomous power” that pit the ‘ruled’ against the ‘rulers’. What is even more important is that *all* members of society are subjected to the habitual continuity of the system, regardless of their actual position in the power hierarchy. Havel specifically notes that while ‘sovietologists’ tend to overestimate the role of the individual in the ‘post-totalitarian system’ system, it is important to keep in mind that even those individuals who hold enormous power in the centralised structures are still just blind instruments of the system.

Conceptual apparatus inspired by arts-related metaphors are not rare in the narratives of analyses of centrally controlled systems. Examples can be found even in accounts stemming from perspectives somewhat remote from the arts world. Michael Burawoy and János Lukács chose to narrate the story of social and industrial issues in totalitarian Hungary through the metaphor of painting, since “building socialism turns into its *painting*, reminding all of the gap between what is and what should be”. They noted that it is “all around ... compelling compliance with its rituals of affirmation ... painting over the sordid realities of socialism is simultaneously the paint of an appearance of brightness, efficiency, and justice. Socialism becomes an elaborate game of pretence which everyone sees through but which is compelled to play. ... The compulsion to participate in the socialist game is potentially explosive – the pretence becomes an alternative turned against reality”.⁶⁷ A particularly appealing way in which to

⁶⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁷ Michael Burawoy and János Lukács, *The Radiant Past. Ideology and Reality in Hungary's Road to Capitalism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 127, 129. The development of this metaphor is related to the participant-observation project Burawoy conducted as a worker in the Hungarian *Lenin Steel Works*. In his notes on Burawoy's professional career, having served as the 2003–2004 President of the American Sociological Association, Jeff Byles noted that “(...) the workers were ordered to paint their slag drawer bright yellow. Burawoy could only scrounge a black brush and proceeded to paint the group's shovels black. When a supervisor demanded an explanation, he replied haltingly that he was, well, helping to

portray the late stages of development of any centrally controlled socio-cultural system seems to have been to make reference to rituals, games, and appearances that not only differ from the 'real', but also tend to reproduce themselves and may even hold 'revolutionary' potential. Nevertheless, Havel's understanding of the game and rituals that constituted life under the 'old regime', the presumption of which is that there is also a 'true' life where the performative mask of appearances would no longer be needed. Not *all* the world is a stage, and the body of a naked emperor is still under his imaginary coat. As I already noted elsewhere, for Havel, the game must be unmasked in order to reveal the central conflict between the lie and the truth, between appearance and essence, between the stage and the *real* life that exists outside the oppressive regime. It is this regime that keeps pushing individuals onto the stage and makes them perform.⁶⁸

As it is generally known, one of the key features of communist propaganda, a feature that turned out to mean that the survival of the communist regime was doomed, was that it presented its own (planned, command-system, etc.) way of social organisation as the culmination of history. Although 'socialism' was still framed as being one step short of the 'ideal communist society', there was essentially no room for any other avenues to follow, and it was portrayed by the establishment as essentially an endless and eternal objective to endeavour towards. The fixed and permanent nature of life under the 'old regime' may have been experienced as frustrating for some, but it also created a feeling of safety for others. However, there was no certainty about when, or even if, there would be an end to what was discursively framed as a continuous and interminable process of playing games and performing. It is in this sense that elsewhere I have employed Judith Butler's notion of 'performativeness' as one possible way of understanding the complexity of everyday life under the constraints of the regime. It is certainly difficult, if not impossible, to simply juxtapose Havel's and Butler's understandings of performativeness. Nonetheless, her notion of performativeness does not refer to a temporary deviation from straightforward behaviour, from the world of 'truths', but to a process that, by

build socialism. A comrade shot back with gallows humor: 'Misi, you are not building socialism, you are painting socialism, and black at that.' See Jeff Byles, "Profile of the President. Tales of the Kefir Furnaceman: Michael Burawoy," in <http://www2.asanet.org/governance/burawoy.html> (accessed March 5 2007). A version of the article appeared in *The Village Voice* (17 April 2001).

⁶⁸ J. Šmejkalová (1994), 203.

repetition, creates the semblance of natural stability.⁶⁹ What connects her writing (largely influenced by Foucault's theory of power) and that of Havel is the attempt to conceptualise a highly regulative regime of oppressive social practices. Regardless of how distant Butler's geopolitical and conceptual context is from Havel's, her concept provides a source of inspiration for contemplating the late stages of the totalitarian – or what Havel would call 'post-totalitarian' – regimes in Eastern Europe in the 1980s. In Butler's understanding of performance there is no essence beyond the performative act. Her understanding of performativeness potentially allows for performance to be contemplated as a social practice of ongoing becoming and constructing within oppressive regulatory regimes in more general terms.⁷⁰ And this notion of performance can even be employed in an analysis of those regulatory regimes that arguably allowed even more limited space for negotiating alternative deals than the heterosexual matrix conceptualised by Butler.

These features would also have characterised the social practices related to the centrally controlled and 'censored' production and distribution of books, when understood in complex terms, rather than exclusively in reference to the highly selective, supposedly almighty and fixed list of *libri prohibiti*. Translated into the world of command-system publishing, by acting as if the existing institutions of publishing houses, bookstores, and printing companies were fully legitimate entities that functioned to achieve concrete goals, individual actors performed the roles of 'authors', 'editors', and 'book buyers'. However, there is one more aspect of performativeness that needs to be considered – the *audience*. People performed what they considered to be their own roles but also acted in *anticipation* of the possible reactions of their imagined audience. Performances were not just a matter of personal choice; they were not of an individual nature. These were largely communal acts, as every individual always had to consider the expectations

⁶⁹ J. Šmejkalová 1994, 203, in reference to Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁷⁰ To see something as performative "suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality." Acts, gestures, enactments are "*performative* in a sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means". Butler's notion of performativeness – largely contemplated in relation to the gendered body – raises the issue of gender identity as an ongoing process, "a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end". J. Butler (1990), 136, 33.

of and constraints imposed upon them by their co-actors. In this sense Kopecký's wish came true – book production, like any other social and cultural practice, became *collective* in the sense that groups of allied individuals, which existed in virtually every professional setting, performed jointly in order to achieve a certain goal. Like Havel's greengrocer, these individuals may not have approved of the goal or even agreed on its definition. What kept their joint performance together was a kind of deal, which resulted from the ongoing re-negotiation and manoeuvring between the various expectations demanded by different audience members. Thus, for an editor, the audience members were not just the people with the power to make decisions about the public appearance of certain texts and their authors, but also the potential readers-consumers, who, despite or perhaps because of all the constraints, were anticipating the arrival of a readable book on the market. At the same time, the deal also had to be negotiated with consideration for the safety and relative well-being of the co-actors.

A number of concerns would have contributed to shaping a person's performance – 'ordinary' fear, for instance, or just the fact that those who deeply disagreed with 'game playing' simply became tired of the hassle of resisting and gradually conformed, using any possible argument to justify their turn.⁷¹ Some witnesses and participants of these performances, such as the renowned Hungarian fiction writer György Konrád, even saw fear as a leading principle of the notion of censorship, which he defined as a 'big lie', only powerful when one is afraid of it.⁷² Everyone who under the 'old regime' contributed to the public perception of a text in the form of an officially produced and distributed volume of papers, was forced to compromise their expectations to some extent, regardless of whether they were playing the role of author or editor, or whether the text was supposed to be a novel or a booklet

⁷¹ Clearly one of the key turning points would have been membership in the Communist Party. Since the events of the late 1960s and the repressive counter-reaction of the regime, joining the Party was not just an expression of a certain political inclination. It was a tool of social mobility, which could morally condemn the given individuals within their family or target group and could be followed by feelings of personal failure and guilt. Arguments like "I'm doing it in order to protect my family, to make it possible for my kids to go schools", etc., were often used by individuals to preserve their mental integrity rather than as actual attempts to explain their decision.

⁷² Discussed in Wolfgang Eichwede, "Archipel Samizdat," in *Samizdat. Alternative Kultur in Zentral- und Osteuropa; die 60er bis 80er Jahre* (Bremen: Temmen, 2000), 8–19.

on fishing. Such expectations would often have been mutually contradictory for it was not just the authorities who were involved, but also colleague-editors and other authors, and even informal circles of friends, family members, and, potentially, the 'common reader'. Most importantly, every individual had also to take into account his or her own expectations and fears, and these did not necessarily match either of those listed above.

Archival resources and testimonies of various professionals involved in the work in state-run publishing houses provide a wide range of stories that exemplify these performative principles. While propagandistic and pro-regime texts were certainly massively produced, the actors in the official publishing sphere tend to refer to a process that Aleš Zach, has called "attempts at pushing the barriers from within".⁷³ For example editors of the state-controlled Vyšehrad publishing house highlighted all the 'good books' that they managed to produce in the 1950s despite the tragic impact of the Stalinist repression on the publishing house's staff. In their testimonies (indeed written ex-post, i.e. after 1989) they talk about the "need to improvise" and refer to editor-colleagues who "even in the hardest times were trying to find an ideological loophole" in order to release a book "whose value went far beyond the average production". In fact, even coping with the "unexpected circumstances" that often emerged was framed as a source of pride, and work-related satisfaction rather than complaints tend to be hidden between the lines of the speakers' narrative. Thus, for example, the Czech translation of Graham Green's *A Sort of Life* was released in 1974 but did not go into distribution until ten years later. Nevertheless, the ex-editor of Green's book refers repeatedly to the positive feelings he had from the very fact of finally seeing 'his' books on the bookstore shelves, i.e. feelings that went far beyond the work routine.⁷⁴ Even texts with no obvious reference to political currents, such as the new Czech translation of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* released in 1952, carried special social and political 'capital'. This "commemoration of unselfish Castilian knight and an incorrigible dreamer of social justice" was seen as "an unquestionably needed act" in the midst of the hardcore Stalinist period.⁷⁵ Another way of following the performative principles noted

⁷³ A. Zach (2005).

⁷⁴ *70 let nakladatelství Vyšehrad 1934 – 2004* [70 Years of the Publishing House Vyšehrad 1934–2004] (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2004), 26, 16, 27.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 52.

above was by publishing potentially suspicious texts under rather ‘innocent’ and often misleading titles. Since texts with religious motives were prime candidates for being labelled as ‘suspicious’, a book on the history of early Christianity, for example, was released in 1986 under the title *Song about a Pearl*.⁷⁶ Later on, the book’s author reviewed a Soviet-produced book with a seemingly ‘innocent’ title, in this case referring to a geographical region, which in fact concealed a collection of New Testament texts by Eastern religious authors. As one of the Vyšehrad editors noted, he soon “realised that other fellows under the totalitarian regime were familiar with this disguise technique too”.⁷⁷

A certain amount of performativeness affected every stage of the publishing process. A publisher could agree to a limited print run of even a slightly ‘suspicious’ title in anticipation of limited paper supply or in anticipation of possible arguments from the authorities. Agreeing to a limited print run would often have been the only way to make the release of such a title possible at all. In anticipation of arguments against the book, an editor would suggest removing ‘rebellious’ chapters from the text, while the author may even have avoided writing them at all in anticipation of a possible negative reaction from his or her editor. At the same time, an author had to include at least some such chapters in anticipation of the demands of the audiences and fellow-authors who may have expected a certain level of ‘courage’ from the author’s writing. These negotiations included manipulating the names and identities of authors and even translators, when, for example, following the practice of ‘pokrývání’ (covering up), persons banned from publishing would have published their work under names of their courageous colleagues.⁷⁸ Needless to say, these types of performances involved a high risk of persecution for everyone involved. It is important to stress again that it was the editors and senior editors who, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, bore much of the direct and indirect responsibility for the released texts, as the office of print control legally ceased to exist in 1968. Thus the constraints on individual performances were never certain and were always flexible to the extent that

⁷⁶ Petr Pokorný, *Píseň o perle: tajné knihy starověkých gnostiků* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1986). Print run of 17 000.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁷⁸ For an account of this commonly used practice see memoirs of one of the major translators from English Rudolf Pellar, *Nejdřív se musíte narodit...* [At First You Have to be Born...], (Prague: Radioservis, 2008).

every decision was built on the 'anticipation' of someone else's performance.

Available accounts of the Czech post-1968 production of periodicals also give examples of the operation of performative mechanisms, though from a slightly different perspective. Tomášek notes that "a multi-step ladder of responsibility was constructed: the publisher shielded the editor-in-chief, the editor-in-chief shielded the editors, the editors the authors, and so on., ... in this way in many editors' offices they were able to 'listen to the grass growing' and everyone was afraid to publish even things which previous censors would have allowed through without any problem".⁷⁹ The actual role played by professionals and by the 'consumers' of their production (i.e. rank-and-file members of the editorial offices, copyeditors, translators, printers, booksellers, and – at the reception end – regular library visitors and book buyers whether material or intellectual) in any of the spheres of centrally controlled social practices was a matter of debate long before the regime collapsed. Who were these people and what was their role? Were they – in this case, the authors, editors, readers, etc. – simply part of that opportunistic 'grey zone' described by the dissident sociologist Jiřina Šiklová as people who were "perhaps a little 'dirty' ... neither white nor black, easily changing into one or the other", since "though hesitantly, reluctantly, they cooperated with the establishment anyway and accepted certain benefits in exchange for their relative conformity"?⁸⁰ Was the state-operated publishing house simply reinforcing the establishment in a sense that it "was never just tolerated by the regime; on the contrary, it was used as a vehicle of its ideological and political goals. Rather than being a source of resistance and anti-regime opposition, it was the opium of the Czech intelligentsia. Everyday more or less successful attempts to circumvent Party

⁷⁹ However, a total repeal of all laws restricting the printed word was not made until Act No. 86/1990 was introduced, which abolished all formal interventions in published writings in the country. See D. Tomášek (1994), 154–155.

⁸⁰ J. Šiklová, in Goetz-Stankiewicz (1992), 184. Šiklová argued that while traditional class and social stratification divisions in the 'East' had been erased, members of the 'silent majority', who joined neither the Party nor the dissidents, operated in all professional spheres. This social group "consists for the most part of diligent, qualified, professionally erudite people ... and because their political involvement was minimal, they also had a lot more time for their own education and training, both personally and professionally". Šiklová predicted even as late as September 1989 that this group would be "of immense importance in the course of the anticipated changes in this [Czech] society in the future." *Ibid.*, 183.

supervision took place within the system and never against it”, as one of the post-1989 publishers argued in reference to Odeon, a renowned house that focused on translated literature and by the late 1980s was producing approximately 150 titles annually.⁸¹ By the late normalisation period especially, it was more the mutual anticipation of performances than the direct exercise of restriction that constituted the mechanism of controlling access to a text. In this context, there is not much sense in asking whether the modest resistance shown by publishing houses that were trying to promote certain authors and texts against the will of the authorities was an act in opposition to the regime or one actually supportive of it. Rather gaining an insight into the very operation of the houses, into the activities of their employees, and the discourses associated with the book world that can help to reveal the complexity of processes that shaped the system and gradually generated its collapse.

⁸¹ Petr Sacher, “Dvakrát nevstoupíš do jedné řeky. Zamyšlení nad novým pokusem o revitalizaci nakladatelství Odeon,” [You Cannot Cross the Same River Twice. A Few Thoughts on the New Attempt to Revive Odeon Publishers], *Knihkupec a nakladatel V* (XIX)/ 3 (2000): 12–13. Total production since Odeon was established in 1953 amounted to nearly 8000 titles. See “Odeon,” in J. Halada (2007), 241–243.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LITERARY ESTABLISHMENT

As already noted, the themes of 'books' and 'literature' tend to be blurred, not just in the scholarship on publishing and reading, but also in practice. Not only does the area of literature in book production tend to 'colonise' the book as an object of enquiry, but historically the borderlines between literary and non-literary texts have been unstable and negotiable based on conventional interpretations. There are many examples of literary and semi-literary texts that were of substantial socially and politically subversive power. Robert Darton's work, for example, on 'forbidden bestsellers' showed that the definition of such genres and their capacity to bear various 'non-literary' messages has changed continuously over time. In the socio-cultural context of 'normalised' Czechoslovakia, where achieving the appearance of a steady state of affairs was among the key goals of the establishment, it was the production and dissemination of *literary* texts in the narrower sense (i.e. mainly fiction and poetry) that served as one of the most publicly visible signs of this stability. Both the institutional framework and personnel, established in the early 1970s, served as a secure barrier that prevented major changes in book production and reception from occurring until the first half of the 1980s. A relatively narrow circle of people occupied the positions of power in virtually all book-related institutions. Among the few indicators of possible change, still within the limits of the 'normalised' institutional and political setting, was the pressure exerted by a younger generation of poets (Jaroslav Čejka, Karel Šýs, Josef Peterka) on the older generation (Ivan Skála) to ease access to positions in the professional hierarchy.¹

These 'younger' poets built their careers in the 1970s, so they represented a generation of authors literally born on the ruins of the 1968 cultural upheaval, when, in the aftermath of the purges of authors and

¹ "Politické a kulturní souvislosti: Dílčí posuny od počátku osmdesátých let," [The Political and Cultural Context: Partial Changes since the Beginning of the 1980s], in Pavel Janoušek et al., eds., *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989. Díl 4 (1969–1989)* [History of Czech Literature 1945–1989, Vol. 4, 1969–1989], (Prague: Academia 2008), 44–56.

texts during early ‘normalisation’, the local cultural scene suffered a relative shortage of personnel willing to cooperate with the re-installed hard-line communist regime. By the 1980s they had managed to occupy most of the main institutional positions in the local book world (with the exception of the positions of underpaid booksellers and literature teachers). Alongside their own creative writing they managed to accumulate enough social and political capital to be able to inhabit the editorial offices of major publishing houses (Československý spisovatel), sit on the editorial boards of periodicals (*Kmen*, a literary supplement of *Tvorba* since 1982), and get actively involved in the management of the Writers’ Union, and built opportunities for interventions at both the Party and governmental levels.² The capital they were successfully accumulating was not just symbolic, as privileges could be translated into honoraria. A system was gradually established in which a publisher had to release a work by a prominent author and publish it with a high print run because of his (rarely her) special status in the political and cultural hierarchy, regardless of the potential book

² The academic *Dictionary of Czech Literature* refers to Karel Sýs (‘1946) as one of the most visible figures who dominated official poetry and cultural politics of the 1970s and 1980s. He was an editor of the official cultural weekly *Tvorba* since 1974, a deputy of the editor-in-chief of its literary supplement *Kmen* since 1983, and headed *Kmen* after it became an independent periodical (1988–1989). At the same time he served as an external reviewer of poetry for a number of official publishing houses (Mladá fronta, Čs. spisovatel, Severočeské nakladatelství, Práce and Profil). His own poetry from this period “emphasised animality and sexual openness, which balanced on the very borderline of provocation”. After 1989, he assumed the position of “perhaps the last moralist and critics of the post-November development”, while through “abuses and direct threats the poet expresses his belief in the necessity to renew the rightful reign of communism”. See “Karel Sýs,” in *Slovník české literatury po roce 1945* [The Dictionary of Czech Literature since 1945], Ústav pro českou literaturu ČSAV: <http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/> (accessed 25 October 2008). Jiří Žáček (‘1945) was also among those who – after his first poems were published in literary journals in 1965 – fully entered the literary establishment in the early 1970s. From 1974 to 1991 he was an editor at Československý spisovatel, and headed its poetry department since 1988. He also wrote occasional reviews and essays for some of the leading officially published cultural periodicals and dailies. In his own early poetry he tried to “ostracise (poetry’s) ‘literary pose’ and noble attributes”, to develop an “intimate contact with the reader, to make lyrics more civil by turning it into a narrow set of feelings, impressions and perceptions, which ostensibly deny any metaphysics”. He intentionally honoured playfulness, improvisation and humour, features that not only made his poems very popular but also generated his continuous interest in poetry for children, which, particularly after 1989, became a focal part of his work. See “Žáček, Jiří” in Pavel Janoušek (ed.), *Slovník českých spisovatelů od roku 1945* [The Encyclopaedia of Czech Fiction Writers Since 1945], (Prague: Brána & Ústav pro českou literaturu Akademie věd ČR, 2 volumes: 1995–1998), Vol. 2, 715–718.

sales.³ If a protégé poet, for example, was able to negotiate a fee of around 38 CSK per line for a book with 2000 lines of verse, he (in fact, as no protected poetesses were published at that time) would have cashed in on honoraria “equal to three years of income of a ‘common worker’ – otherwise the favourite hero of his [the poet’s] poetic constructions”.⁴

In fact, restricting access to publishing to authors of a certain age was yet another tool used to conserve and preserve the established order, a mechanism designed to block change. While the average age of poets publishing their first book in 1978 was approximately 37 years old, and 32 years in 1988, the average age of any author published a year prior to the collapse of the command book system was 46.⁵ In other words, an age when more experienced authors tend to settle down and turn to more balanced and mature forms and content instead of experimenting and exploring new and unknown areas. Some critics of the younger generation entering the literary scene in the mid-1980s began gently referring to the questionable quality of the

³ Larger print runs were not uncommon in the pre-communist book market, especially for best-selling authors; for example, in the 1930s Karel Čapek’s collection of short detective stories, *Povídky z jedné kapsy* [Stories from One Pocket], was released with a total print run of ten thousand hardback copies and fifteen thousand paperbacks. Nonetheless, as the command system of book production put an end to this uncontrolled ‘waste of paper’ and the ‘easy’ profit generated supposedly by a limited group of fiction writers and especially by their publishers, an author’s fee was no longer based on the number of copies sold but in the case of prose on the number of printed pages and in the case of poetry on the number of printed lines. Print runs were fixed by a standard run of five thousand copies for prose and three thousand for poetry. Later, a norm of ten thousand was approved for non-fiction titles, and in the case of a few popular genres that the communist authorities considered to be more or less acceptable, such as carefully selected mysteries and detective stories, the print runs were sometimes as high as twenty thousand. See Jan Halada, *Člověk a kniha* [People and Books], (Prague: Universita Karlova, 1993), 58, 67.

⁴ Ladislav Verecký, “Napišu vám trháč,” [I’ll Write you a Bestseller], *Magazín Dnes*, (21 April 2005): 20.

⁵ Milan Blahynka, “Zpráva o české poezii roku 1988,” [A Report on Czech Poetry in 1988], *Kmen*, II (VIII)/ 3, (1989), 1. Without underestimating Goethe’s ‘poetry of life experience’, most poets in 20th-century European literary history made their literary debut when they were in their early twenties, and this was also the case in pre-communist Czechoslovakia. By the time they were thirty their career masterpiece would already have been in print, as was the case of Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986) who published his first book of poetry in 1921, Jiří Wolker (1900–1924) in 1921, and Josef Hora (1891–1945) in 1915, to name just a few of the key representatives of the strong inter-war generation of poets in Czechoslovakia. Even Milan Kundera published his first book of (strongly pro-regime) verses, *Člověk: zahrada širá* [Man: A Broad Garden], with a decent print run of 2000, in 1953, when he was just 24 years old.

poetic over-production the post-1968 generation of poets was known for and their dominant position in the local literary context; voices were heard claiming that the number of verses in their poems was inspired by the honoraria system rather than the internal structure of the texts.⁶ Nonetheless, even in 1988, they still enjoyed the full support of the literary establishment. One prominent literary scholar, Milan Blahynka, just a few months before the Revolution, celebrated Sýs's poetry by suggesting that it represents "perhaps the biggest upheaval of fantasy, the most natural metaphoric sovereignty, where the general care of Czech poetry for the future of the garden of Bohemia becomes concentrated".⁷ The monopolisation of the book-related institutional network by a limited number of individuals was made possible not just by their managerial skills but also by the centralised infrastructure of the local media. For example, the sum of the space available in the print media for discussing issues related in some way to literature and books was just one monthly publication devoted specifically to domestic literature, one other periodical dedicated to foreign literature, and occasional reviews in selected dailies. This limited media space was moreover carefully controlled by just a handful of individuals. Literary and poetic programmes on television and radio were reduced to a few short programmes filled with melodramatic declamations, programmes like *Nedělní chvilka poezie* (Sunday Poetry Time), which was broadcast on one of the two local television channels every Sunday evening. But there was essentially no truly critical platform capable of providing a forum for the exchange of possibly controversial views.

Literary historians have documented just a few book-related affairs that disrupted the appearance of constant steadiness in the literary-institutional status quo and would have been indicative of the changes to come.⁸ One such affair was the release of a study called *Prozaická skutečnost* (Prosaic Reality) in 1982, written by Jan Lukeš, a literary critic of the younger generation, who gently but effectively attacked the poetry establishment of the 1970s for its inability to give voice to the tensions of contemporary society. He also highlighted the social and

⁶ See, for example reviews of Sýs's poetry by Zbyněk Vybíral in *Brněnský večerník*, 7 November 1986 and 17 March 1986.

⁷ M. Blahynka (1989), 1.

⁸ "Politické a kulturní souvislosti: Dílčí posuny od počátku osmdesátých let," [The Political and Cultural Context: Partial Changes since the Beginning of the 1980s], in Pavel Janoušek et al., eds., *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989. Díl 4 (1969–1989)* [History of Czech Literature 1945–1989, Vol. 4, 1969–1989], (Prague: Academia, 2008), 44–56.

cultural meaning of the work of the youngest generation and of unpublished tools of textual communication, like the lyrics of alternative song writers. The 'targets' of his analyses, namely Karel Sýs and Josef Peterka, managed in their aggressive reviews to discredit Lukeš's findings in both professional and political terms. One of the most powerful figures of the official literary scene, Vítězslav Ržounek, a professor of Czech literature at Charles University even indirectly accused Lukeš of questioning the process of 'normalisation'. As a result, Václav Falada, the editor-in-chief of *Mladá fronta* publishers, released a self-critical apology in *Tvorba*, claiming that this subjective and insensitive attempt at literary criticism harmed the reputation of the house.⁹ The very publication of the book indeed represented a refreshing sign of the different approach to textual production that emerged in the context of the official sphere. At the same time, paradoxically, the pro-regime poets (Sýs, Peterka), who came out of the affair as the clear winners, managed to further cement their political and institutional position within the literary hierarchy and to further control the definition of what was to be 'allowed' or at least 'tolerated' and of the very notion of 'literary development' in the course of the next decade.

Nevertheless, just a brief look at the editorial practices of their publishers suggests that even those poets who – at least ostensibly – enjoyed the benefits provided by the dominant regime were confronted with suspicion and criticism from their older colleagues. Thus, for example, Milan Blahynka, in an internal review of one of Jiří Žáček's and Karel Sýs's books (their dialogue on poetry, submitted for publication in 1985), noted that he did not "see its key quality in the novelty of the ideas but rather in their sententiousness". Editorial records also include a note that the authors were notified about the comments regarding the "ideological and political aspects" of the text and that they had fully accepted all the suggested changes.¹⁰ In a review of another book of Sýs's poetry in 1983, the literary scholar Vladimír Macura noted

⁹ For reflections on the debates and conflicts that preceded and followed the publication of Lukeš's book, see Pavel Janoušek, "Spor o Lukeše," [The Controversy over Lukeš], in *Normy normalizace ...*, 82–90.

¹⁰ For the editorial records on Jiří Žáček and Karel Sýs, *1+ 1, aneb, Nesoustavný rozhovor o poezii* [One Plus One, or an Inconsistent Conversation about Poetry], published by Československý spisovatel (Prague: 1986) with a print run of 8000 copies see Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví [LAPNP - Literary Archive of the Muzeum of Czech Literature], location Zámek Staré Hradky. File "Československý spisovatel" – "Sýs-Žáček".

that, although the “poet is not situated ‘above’ reality, but always connected to other people”, some of his verses were “sometimes shallow, perhaps too concentrated on self-stylisation”. Despite these critical comments, the book was published in 1985 with a print run of 12,000 copies, and Československý spisovatel even released a second edition with a print run of 6,500 as late as 1990.¹¹

Perhaps most important was the power of the mutually supportive networks of key representatives in the literary world. Thus, Jiří Žáček – then an executive editor of Československý spisovatel – wrote an internal review of a collection of poems called *Atomový pléd* (1985) by his fellow-poet and editor of the major cultural weekly *Kmen* Karel Sýs, noting, almost in the style of the 1950s, that “the book again proves the social and political dimension of Sýs’s poetry, his attempt at mobilising the best forces in a man of our times, a disdain for bourgeois pseudo-morals and the continuing ideal of a meaningful life”.¹² In another book of Sýs’s poetry, *Americký účet* (1980), Jiří Žáček appreciated the emphasis on “the everlasting human desire for a fulfilling life” and “the playful as well as lupine metaphors” that Sýs applied in his poems.¹³ Fellow poet Miroslav Florian noted that Sýs’s “almost provocative spontaneity is gradually transforming itself into an intensified desire for the truth”.¹⁴ Such statements were not just pure poetic judgements, but largely represented an entrance ticket to the publishing domain, and as such they further cemented the already close circles of (predominantly) men who circulated between the positions of both authors and managers of the literary establishment in order to jointly reproduce the establishment and guarantee its continuity.

And yet, authors who represented borderline cases, balancing on the edge between the official mainstream and the semi-official, underground and exiled margins, also had their place in the command system, despite the fact that the definition of what that place was continues to be the source of disagreement and dispute to date. The two most

¹¹ For the editorial records on Karel Sýs, *Kniha přísloví* [A Book of Aphorisms], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986) see LAPNP, file “Československý spisovatel” – “Sýs”.

¹² For the editorial records on Karel Sýs, *Atomový pléd* [Nuclear Wrap], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986) see LAPNP, file “Československý spisovatel” – “Sýs”.

¹³ *Ibid.* *Atomový pléd* was released with a print run of 3000 and *Americký účet* [American Bill] with a print run of 5000 copies.

¹⁴ For the editorial records on Karel Sýs, *Americký účet* [American Bill] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1980) see LAPNP, file “Československý spisovatel” – “Sýs”.

notorious cases are the stories of Bohumil Hrabal and Jaroslav Seifert, who, despite the many studies of their work, both domestic and foreign, deserve some more attention here, particularly as complex examples of publishing practices in the 1970s and 1980s. Hrabal's multifaceted reputation went far beyond the pure relationship between an author and his texts, as it also involved the controversial image of an author as an object of the regime's corruption and of an author as hero. Part of his image was his much maligned 'cowardly betrayal' in 1975, but he was also a legendary figure, an elderly, modestly dressed man, touring his favourite pubs in Prague's Old Town, carrying a string bag packed with green hundred-crown banknotes – his honoraria, which from a distance looked like a pile of fresh vegetables. He would say that "one can't eat more than two goulashes at once after all ...", and he practised this philosophy in his later years, living a hermit-like existence in a small cottage near Prague that he shared with a tribe of cats.¹⁵

More important than these widely medialised images was the relationship between Hrabal's manuscripts and the mutated versions of his texts produced in virtually every available outlet of official and unofficial publishing. Since his first publications came out in the 1960s, he was constantly criticised for his relaxed attitude towards his own texts.¹⁶ Hrabal's chief samizdat editor Václav Kadlec, discussed this matter in his contribution to the *Hrabaliana*, a collection of essays by key underground critics and scholars that in honour of Hrabal's 75th birthday he published in *Pražská imaginace* (Prague Imagination) in March 1989, literally a few month before the collapse of the communist regime.¹⁷ He

¹⁵ Ladislav Verecký, "Napišu vám trháč," [I'll Write You a Bestseller], *Magazín Dnes*, (21 April 2005): 20.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the complex relations between Hrabal's texts and their public appearance see, for example, Tomáš Mazal, *Spisovatel Bohumil Hrabal* [The Writer Bohumil Hrabal], (Prague: Torst, 2004); Václav Kadlec, "Bázlivý hrdina Bohumil Hrabal," [The Faint-Hearted Hero Bohumil Hrabal], in Milan Jankovič and Josef Zumr eds., *Hrabaliana: sborník prací k 75. narozeninám Bohumila Hrabala* [Hrabaliana – a Collection of Essays on the Occasion of the 75th Birthday of Bohumil Hrabal], (1st official edition: Prague: Prostor, 1990), 11–36; originally published in samizdat edition by *Pražská imaginace* in March 1989 with a print run of 30 copies.

¹⁷ See Jankovič and Zumr eds., (1990). In his samizdat editorial project *Pražská Imagination* Kadlec designed a unique edition of the complete works of Bohumil Hrabal in twenty-two volumes. After 1989 he set up a private publishing company that managed to release nineteen volumes of Hrabal's work during the 1990s. The house's website states that by late 1997 the project was temporarily interrupted due to the total financial and physical exhaustion of Kadlec, but since 1999 he has continued to produce other ambitious projects, such as publishing selected works by other Czech

noted that despite all the corruption, glorification, persecution, threats, systematic silencing, and 'live mummification' that he faced during his life, Hrabal's work represented a form of ongoing experimentation with the attempt to express the truth.¹⁸ Nonetheless Kadlec acknowledged that in the case of a 'myth-constructive' personality like Hrabal's, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify what the "author's original intention" was, since publishers (in every sphere of textual production) present readers with texts in a form that is always the result of an interaction between self-control, deliberate editorial interventions, and simply mistakes.

Ever since Československý spisovatel first began publishing Hrabal's texts in 1963, editors had been attempting to delete certain parts of his texts, mainly the sexually and politically loaded parts.¹⁹ While from the mid-1970s onward the official editions of Hrabal's work in particular suffered from alterations to their content and form, samizdat and the largely samizdat-based texts produced by exile publishers left almost unlimited room for interventions into the texts and for mistakes by editors and typists, who varied in their ability, and the author himself had almost no control over the changes that occurred in his texts. Driven by a desire for contact with the reading audiences that Hrabal's biographers continually refer, Hrabal himself actively participated in this textual interchange. Especially when working with official publishers he would de-construct his own texts, expell some parts, add others (often with the help of scissors and glue) and again re-construct the motifs, passages, and characters in the text. Hrabal even allowed a title to migrate from one text to another. Original versions of his texts, particularly from his early period of writing in the 1950s, are essentially non-existent, and thus the very concept of 'originality' is challenged from within the nature of Hrabal's writing process.²⁰

authors, mainly those personally and/or intellectually close to Hrabal, i.e. Ivo Vodsedálek, Egon Bondy and Karel Marysko, and works by Jiří Suchý, a poet, screen-writer, dramatist and actor, and the co-founder of the legendary *Semafor Theatre* (est. 1959). See: <http://lege.cz/pibib.htm> (accessed 9 June 2008). In 2003 Kadlec was awarded the prestigious *Magnesia Litera* prize for his work to promote Czech literature and especially Hrabal's work in both samizdat and official publishing.

¹⁸ V. Kadlec (1990), 12.

¹⁹ *Perlička na dně* [A Little Pearl at the Bottom], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1963). The first book *Skřivánci na niti* [Larks on a String] was prepared for publication by the same publisher in 1959 but never released. A film adaptation of the story by Jiří Menzel was completed in 1969 but did not go into distribution until 1990.

²⁰ He wrote some of the most important texts of his career during the early 1970s when he was banned from official publishing. These texts included *Cutting It Short*,

According to another samizdat activist, Jiří Gruntorád, 'editorial samizdat', which is how he refers to the texts published outside the official sphere, provides a particularly solid resource for the consistent study of the different textual mutations of a work, which in Hrabal's case tend to be particularly complex, and which Hrabal himself intentionally encouraged.²¹ Gruntorád compiled a bibliography of the majority of samizdat editions of Hrabal's work for which material evidence existed and argued that even a basic question, like which of his titles appeared in samizdat first, is nearly impossible to answer. His texts circulated simultaneously within the networks of different publishing projects (Ludvík Vaculík's *Petlice*, Václav Havel's *Edice Expedice*, Václav Kadlec's *Pražská Imaginace*) and as various individually re-typed copies. Gruntorád argues that a note Hrabal inserted into a volume of three stories titled *Tři teskné grotesky* (Three Nostalgic Stories, *Edice Expedice*, 1978) could be taken as evidence that this was his first samizdat text. In the note, dated October 1971, Hrabal claims that he re-typed several copies of these stories himself.²² Texts for which there

1970; *I Served the King of England*, 1971; *The Little Town Where Time Stood Still*, 1973; *Too Loud a Solitude*, 1976; see Kadlec (1990), 27.

²¹ See Jiří Gruntorád, "Bohumil Hrabal v Libri prohibiti. (Co tu je a co tu není)," [Bohumil Hrabal in Libri Prohibiti, What's There and What Isn't], 99–107 in Milan Jankovič et al., eds., *Hrabaliana rediviva*, sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní mezinárodní konference o díle Bohumila Hrabala, Udine 27–29 October 2005 [Collection of Papers Presented at an International and Interdisciplinary Conference on the Work of Bohumil Hrabal], (Prague: Filosofia, 2006). Gruntorád poetically defines samizdat as "a still little explored continent with many white spots". In reference to a former samizdat activist and scholar, Tomáš Vrba, he considers the term 'inedited' as semantically undeveloped. He makes a distinction between classical samizdat, 'wild' and spontaneous samizdat, Russian-style samizdat, and the specific version of unofficial textual production established in the Czechoslovak context, with Vaculík's *Petlice* being one of the most characteristic examples. This version included more or less regularly produced volumes in the form of an editorial series (p.100).

²² Gruntorád's notes on Hrabal's samizdat edition are based on the holdings of The Libri Prohibiti Library of Samizdat and Exile Literature which he established in 1990, and which is currently operated by a non-profit organisation called Libri Prohibiti Society, headed by Ivan M. Havel. The library contains over 11 000 volumes of Czech and Slovak samizdat non-periodical texts and 300 titles of samizdat periodicals (1960 to 1989); exile texts (1948 – 1998); Polish samizdat literature and magazines (1979 – 1989); literature of Czech wartime exile from 1939 to 1945; literature of the Russian and Ukrainian exile from 1920 to 1990. It also includes foreign language literature related to former Czechoslovakia, documents on the violation of human rights in the former Soviet bloc, a variety of materials from the Czech and Polish domestic and foreign opposition (leaflets, postcards, photographs, etc.); documents relating to the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, dissident initiatives (VONS - Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných, 'Charter 77'), and other audio and video recordings created by domestic and foreign opposition.

was a high demand, and not just Hrabal's, were constantly being re-copied, so it is impossible to reliably date individual titles. For example, there are thirty documented 'editions' of the novel *Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále* (I Served the King of England), and thirty-seven of *Něžný barbar* (Sweet Barbarian), the first text published by Václav Havel's Edice Expedice in 1975. Hrabal was a very attractive commodity for exile publishers, too, and his *Proluky* (Vacant Lots), a quasi-autobiographical text, in which his wife Eliška figures as the narrator, was published simultaneously by three exile houses within 1986 alone. As Gruntorád noted, during the 1980s, exile publishing houses produced various pirate reprints, occasionally based on the official Czech editions of Hrabal's work, as well as on those released in samizdat.²³

Much has been said and written about Hrabal's legendary return to the sphere of official publishing after an interview for the weekly *Tvorba* published in 1975.²⁴ Indeed much was done about it, too: there was a demonstrative burning of his books in the centre of Prague initiated by the radical underground activist and poet Ivan Martin Jirous, known as Magor, who noted five years later: "There is no way to find an apology for what Hrabal has done. In his old age he shitted his pants, just at the moment when people themselves began to copy and borrow his books." As if in a direct polemic with Havel's *Six Asides about Culture* he asked, "doesn't he understand that secret fame is the most important one? That a book typed on lousy paper is much more meaningful than ... a printed and bound one."²⁵ Holding in one's hand thirty years later the issue of *Tvorba* with the Hrabal interview, it is difficult to comprehend its actual socio-political and cultural significance in the context of the mid-1970s. Printed with low-quality ink on even lower-quality, yellowish, A5 paper, the text, simply titled 'An Interview with Bohumil Hrabal', is accompanied by a small black-and-white moderate photograph of the ageing, balding writer. The text is on page thirteen of the supplement, by no means a very visible place in the periodical, and at around one thousand words it takes up less than half a page.

See: Libri Prohibiti. Knihovna samizdatové exilové literatury, "Jiří Gruntorád," <http://libpro.cts.cuni.cz/> (accessed 20 April 2008).

²³ J. Gruntorád (2006), 105.

²⁴ "Rozhovor s Bohumilem Hrabalem," [Interview with Bohumil Hrabal], *Tvorba*, LUK Supplement 2, (8 January 1975): XIII. Unsigned.

²⁵ "Magor (Ivan Martin Jirous) Autodafé," *Revolver Revue* 41 (1999): 223–224. Original text from a manuscript of 1980; also quoted in Tomáš Mazal, *Spisovatel Bohumil Hrabal* (Prague: Torst, 2004), 210.

The interviewer(s), who is hidden behind the anonymous label of 'the editors of *Tvorba*', opens with a somewhat cynical question: "We haven't seen each other for a rather long time. Do you remember our last discussion?" A few lines later they proceed to an even more insistent question: "So why haven't we seen each other for so long? What do you want to tell your readers?" The sixty-year-old Hrabal, eight years since he was last officially published, responded with (perhaps prescribed) statements like: "...I don't want to stand aside, by my own means I do want to contribute to the relations that are supposed to exist among the socialist people", or "I would like my readers to know that I am being honest with them as well as with socialism. For without it I cannot imagine either today or the future". He goes on explicitly approving the authority of the Communist Party and the official Czech Writers' Union and suggests that "many ambiguities and rumours have been accumulated around my personality lately, and I even do not know why and how ... and perhaps I even unwillingly contributed to it by withdrawing into myself, and thus have done exactly what I should not have", while essentially criticising both external and internal (i.e. his own) exile. Essentially since then, references to this interview have moved constantly from one account of Hrabal's work and life to another, while the debates and often controversies surrounding it have continued until today.

Interpretations of the interview swing between two poles: some blamed Hrabal for his cowardliness, others appreciated his concern for the wider reading audience, which, despite all the efforts of alternative book production, was largely dependent on official publishing for reading material. Jirous was by no means alone in his radical reaction; it was more or less representative of many condemnatory comments by other writers.²⁶ However, the above-mentioned *Hrabaliana* volume that was published before November 1989 offered a rather different range of views. For example, a tireless advocate of Hrabal's, Václav Kadlec, tried to draw attention also to "Rukověť pábitelského učně", a self-reflective text by Hrabal that was published together with the

²⁶ The Czech exiled journalist Karel Hvížd'ala asked a number of Czech exiled writers and artists about their views on Hrabal's statement (In: Hvížd'ala Karel, *České rozhovory ve světě* – Czech Interviews in the World; Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1992, 1st edition Köln: Index, 1981). The reactions varied, from 'Hrabal Is a Whore' (the songwriter Karel Kryl), to the view that those writers who have not signed any pro-regime statement shall certainly be appreciated, but that in itself does not make them better writers than Hrabal (fiction writer Rio Preisner).

interview on the same page and actually occupied two-thirds of the space.²⁷ He noted that if “an infantile regime requires a certain statement as a condition for publishing such a paramount text in a mass-distributed journal, then its publication is always a victory for the author”.²⁸ Similarly, Josef Zúmr, a dissident philosopher and a friend of Hrabal, argued that the “narrow-minded cultural policy” had to step back and eventually give up in the face of the strength of Hrabal’s ‘giant work’.²⁹ Ludvík Vaculík said that while many denounced Hrabal Vaculík and his fellow samizdat publishers saw the writer’s reappearance in the official publishing sphere as a sign of their own success. According to Vaculík, Hrabal “was irrepressible, and the regime had to acknowledge him! ... the state was suddenly forced to find some way how to deal with these authors”.³⁰ Rather than a moral failure, Vaculík saw Hrabal’s comeback as resulting from the pressure of alternative textual production and distribution, including his own. In his view, one of the key roles of samizdat was – within a circulation limited in size – to challenge the state’s main strategy of keeping banned authors off the public stage. Samizdat provided those authors with a social space of (relative) visibility, which the regime could no longer ignore and, one way or the other, was forced to address.

The long-debated question of who actually interviewed Hrabal for *Tvorba* was revisited more than ten years after his death when one of the dramatists and prose-writers Adolf Branald published his memoirs.³¹ He reiterated the assumption (accepted by Hrabal’s biographers, including Mazal) that it was Karel Sýs and Jaromír Pelc, two very active pro-regime poets of the ‘normalisation’ period, who conducted the

²⁷ For example, Škvorecký translates Hrabal’s specific concept of *pábitelství* or *pábení* as ‘palavering’. In a sense, this allowed him to elevate the specific beer-fuelled pub-talk among his mostly outsider-characters into a unique and distinctive narrative experience. *Pábení* has been defined as an ‘anecdote without end’ or “a modus vivendi amidst a sense of the absurd, whether social and political or philosophical and existential”. See James Wood, “Bohumil Hrabal,” *London Review of Books* 4 (January 2001), in http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n01/wood02_.html (accessed 30 March 2008); and James Naughton, “Czech Literature since 1918,” 2001, in http://users.ox.ac.uk/~tayl0010/lit_from_1918.htm (accessed 30 March 2008).

²⁸ Václav Kadlec, “Bázlivý hrdina Bohumil Hrabal,” [The Faint-Hearted Hero Bohumil Hrabal], in M. Jankovič (1990), 11–36; quoted from p. 29.

²⁹ Josef Zúmr, “Ideová inspirace Bohumila Hrabala,” [The Ideological Inspiration of Bohumil Hrabal], in M. Jankovič (1990), 135.

³⁰ An interview with Ludvík Vaculík conducted in Prague on 9 July 1999. Quoted in T. Mazal (2004), 210.

³¹ Adolf Branald, *Tichý společník* [Silent Companion], (Prague: Academia, 2005).

interview and also edited and/or adjusted the final version of the text. Sýs, who remained a member of the radical communist left even after 1989, published a critical review of Branald's book in the supplement of the communist periodical *Haló noviny*. Here he talks about the idea of himself and Pelc doing this interview "with (or on behalf of) Hrabal" to be an "already traditional fabrication".³² They were "just messengers", for it was the editor-in-chief of *Tvorba* and active Marxist critic Jiří Hájek who actually conducted this – in Sýs's view – "excellent" interview. Sýs, reflecting on Branald specifically, actually tries to defend Hrabal and considers him to have been misunderstood as well as "used and abused" by the post-1989 establishment. According to Sýs, in 1975, Hrabal only said "all the things that Branald and Co. used to claim too when it suited them ... but which they could not imagine anyone might have meant seriously".

Nonetheless, there seems to be a commonly shared view that much of the interview, particularly the phrases appreciative of the Party and the "socialist country", i.e. the frequently medialised clichés of that time, were added to the interview by the *Tvorba* editors, perhaps even without Hrabal's approval. Tomáš Mazal discusses this issue quite extensively and notes that after obtaining permission to take a summer holiday in Yugoslavia in 1974, Hrabal agreed to officially denounce the samizdat production of his texts and to move towards official publishing.³³ Hrabal wrote a letter about this matter to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, Jan Fojtík, and the interview was under construction, so to speak, since at least October 1974. According to Mazal, what came out in *Tvorba* in January was at least the third version of the interview, and as the Swiss literary scholar Susanne Roth showed in her detailed stylistic analysis of the text, only some of its parts were actually written by Hrabal himself.³⁴

The sixty-two-year-old author returned to the shelves of official bookstores in 1976 with his novel *Postřižiny* (Cutting It Short – written in 1970), which was released by Československý spisovatel with a print

³² Karel Sýs, "Společník s výběračnou pamětí," [A Companion with a Selective Memory], *Obrys-Kmen, Týdeník pro literaturu a kulturu* 6 (10 February 2006), in <http://www.obrys-kmen.cz/index.php?rok=2006&cis=06&cl=06> (accessed 20 June 2008).

³³ T. Mazal (2004), 208–210.

³⁴ Susanna Roth, *Hlučná samota a hořké štěstí Bohumila Hrabala. K poetickému světu autorových próz* [The Loud Solitude and Bitter Happiness of Bohumil Hrabal. On the Poetic World of the Author's Prose], (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1993).

run of twenty thousand copies. Between 1976 and 1988 alone, 12 of his books were officially published (including one re-edition), with print runs of approximately 40 000 – 50 000 copies.³⁵ The last book, in 1988, was a collection titled *Můj svět* (My World), which was published with a print run of 120,000, and this unusually large figure reflected to an extent the gradually emerging tendency of the state-operated publishers to adapt their production strategy to the anticipated demand of readers-consumers. Thus, by the end of the last two decades of the communist era, there were over 600 000 officially released copies of texts by Hrabal in public circulation.³⁶ As even Václav Kadlec – a samizdat activist himself – noted, the social meaning of these official editions was enormous. Despite all the manipulation of the texts, and despite the rather unhealthy publishing monopoly exercised over his work by Československý spisovatel, a house headed at the time by the poet and editor Jan Pilař, these officially produced editions made his texts available to Czech ‘common’ readers.³⁷ The official status of Hrabal’s texts also allowed foreign publishers to buy the copyrights through the state agency Dilia and to release his books in formats that often were more sensitive to the non-edited versions.³⁸

Even this brief insight into the actual editorial process of preparing Hrabal’s manuscripts for publication reveals two inter-linked

³⁵ For information on the print runs of particular officially released titles see the central catalogues and databases of the National Library at <http://sigma.nkp.cz/F>.

³⁶ Between 1982 and 1986 alone, Československý spisovatel released four titles by Hrabal with the following print runs: *Městečko u vody* (containing three texts: *Postřižiny*, *Krasosmutnění*, *Harlekýnovy milióny*, 1982: 50 000), *Hovory lidí* (1984: 50 000), *Život bez smokingu* (1986: 50 000) and the 2nd edition of *Městečko u vody* (1986: 50 000). See the “Catalogue of the National Library” at <http://www.nkp.cz/> and “Knižní vydání” [Published Books] in *Bibliografie, dodatky, rejstříky. Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala Sv. 19* [Bibliography, Additions, Indexes. The Collected Works of Bohumil Hrabal, Vol. 19], (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1997), 264–265. It must be also noted, though, that the queues that formed in front of the bookshops whenever a book by Hrabal was released into distribution suggests that these relatively generous print runs were unable to fully satisfy the demand from readers/consumers.

³⁷ Jan Pilař (1917–1996) was a poet, translator (of German and Polish poetry), essayist, university lecturer, and a leading activist in the ‘normalisation’ of Czech literary institutions during the 1970s and 1980s. Literary historians today refer to his creative writing as being generally schematic, lacking poetic originality, and overall supportive of the leading pro-communist ideology. He became the director of Československý spisovatel in the 1960s, lost his position in 1968, and in 1970 became its editor-in-chief and in 1982 its director again, and he remained in this post until 1989, when he officially retired. See *Slovník českých spisovatelů od roku 1945, Díl, M–Ž* [Dictionary of Czech Fiction Writers Since 1954, Part II, M–Ž], (Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, Prague: Brána, Knižní klub, 1998), 221–223.

³⁸ V. Kadlec (1990), 31.

tendencies.³⁹ First, there was Hrabal's intense desire to be officially published, and second, his editors' and reviewers' attempts at including his texts in the sphere of official publishing, though in variations adjusted to their own construction of Hrabal as an officially approved author. The substantial time gaps between the points when the first version of the manuscript was written, the publishing contract was signed, and the title was actually released had been a standard feature of Hrabal's publication history since the 1960s. The contract for *Postřižiny* was signed in 1971, planned for 1972 and – only after the *Tvorba* interview – was finally released in 1976.⁴⁰ Each of his manuscripts underwent several stages of external and internal review, followed by personal meetings with the editors and reviewers, and each reviewer ('*lektor*') had the authority to suggest textual changes and cuts on which the release of the book may have depended. Vítězslav Ržounek, the person largely responsible for the officially released textual variations of Hrabal's work during the respective period made a comment in one of his reviews of 1985, which could be read as a summary of the key principles of the operation of the official sphere: "Publishing this manuscript is not a standard question of an artistic value. It is a question of cultural politics and that is the way I evaluate this text ... To publish it or not to publish cannot be judged by usually accepted criteria... [we must] adopt clear internal guidelines for publishing in our country. Since nothing of that kind currently exists, it is perhaps necessary to construct such guidelines within the publishing practice itself."⁴¹ Quotations from Ržounek's reviews and from those written by

³⁹ For one of the rare attempts to follow this process in the archives of the Československý spisovatel, currently housed in the Památník národního písemnictví [Museum of Czech Literature], see Michal Bauer, "Lektorské zásahy do rukopisů Bohumila Hrabala vydávaných knižně v sedmdesátých a osmdesátých letech," [Editorial Interventions in the Manuscripts of Bohumil Hrabal published officially during the 1970s and 1980s], in *Život je jinde...? Česká literatura, kultura a společnost v sedmdesátých a osmdesátých letech dvacátého století* [Life is Elsewhere...? Czech literature, Culture and Society in the 1970s and 1980s], (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2002), 117–128.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 118.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 126. Vítězslav Ržounek (1921–2001) was a politician, university lecturer, editor and literary historian, and one of the leading figures of post-1968 'normalisation', particularly in the area of university education and publishing. He studied literature in Prague in the late 1940s and in Moscow in the 1950s, taught cultural politics and literature at a number of institutions of higher education, and worked in the ideological department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. During the political turmoil of the late 1960s he was out of the country serving as a cultural attaché in Italy (1967–71), and shortly after he was appointed first secretary of the Ministry of

his fellow editors and reviewers (i.e. Jan Pilař, the academic and editor Radko Pytlík, the academics Hana Hrzalová and Jaromíra Nejedlá) reveal the notorious fact that it was criteria related to ideology and cultural policy rather than strictly literary criteria that their judgements were grounded in. But even more important they indicate the rather dispersed and variable nature of such criteria, as well as an indeterminate level of individual responsibility for their definition and promotion. Another illustration of the level of uncertainty combined with a high degree of preformative dogmatism could be found in Ržouněk's instructions from 1981 to set up a special board of visual artists, whose task was to screen all the names of artists mentioned in one of Hrabal's semi-autobiographical texts to ensure their political purity.⁴²

At the same time, and despite Hrabal's return to the sphere of official publishing following his official denunciation of samizdat production and distribution of his texts, his work continued to be released in the alternative publishing spheres.⁴³ These also included institutions that operated within the Czechoslovak legal framework but were under constant surveillance from the authorities for creating relatively independent social or cultural networks. Among them was the legendary *Jazzová sekce*, which released the first – semi-official – edition of the novel *I Served the King of England*.⁴⁴ This novel presents a vast narrative

International Affairs. Between 1972 and 1989 he was head of the Department of Czech and Slovak Literature at the Philosophical Faculty, Charles University in Prague, where I studied in the early 1980s. Here I cannot resist one personal recollection of his pedagogic performance. He discussed with me the results of a written exam on contemporary Czech literature and asked me to further explain some of the points I made. I began to answer his question by saying "I thought that ...". He interrupted me in the middle of the sentence and said: "Dear comrade, you are not here in order to think something, but to learn what I have lectured to you – you have failed this exam!"

⁴² Ibid., 125.

⁴³ In 1986, under pressure from the secret police, Hrabal wrote to Vaculík, Ivan Havel and his editor Václav Kadlec, asking them to cease distributing his texts in their samizdat editions. Vaculík reacted with a letter copied to the Secret Police: "wherever I come across your manuscript I shall continue to copy it, and if I weren't to do it, it would be done by someone else". He also no longer requested Hrabal's personal authorisation of the manuscripts, which was included in each volume to protect the unofficial publishing 'business' from being charged with unlawful distribution, and continued to authorise them himself with a note "On behalf of Hrabal – Vaculík". Quoted in J. Gruntorád (2006), 102.

⁴⁴ Bohumil Hrabal, *Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále* (Prague: JAZZ PETIT, No. 9, 1982). Graphic design by Joska Skalník, edited by Karel Srp. *Jazzová sekce* (1971–1986) was a major independent cultural organisation, legally approved to operate in socialist Czechoslovakia. It organised jazz and rock concerts, art exhibitions, and theatrical productions, and by the mid-1980s it had thousands of members. It also ran a number

spanning some of the most dramatic periods of Czech history of the 20th century, including the Second World War and the communist takeover in 1948. Not only was Hrabal's picture of these turning points very different from the interpretation presented by the official ideology, but it also included numerous erotically flavoured passages and strong themes of solitude and alienation, features that were not welcome within the concept of 'socialist literature'. Hrabal himself was convinced that the novel would never be officially released, and the complex publication story of the novel was indeed typical of the institutional turmoil that surrounded most of Hrabal's texts. Hrabal wrote the text over a few weeks in the summer of 1971, and it initially existed as a typewritten original and four copies, which Hrabal shared with his closest friends. The novel was soon after released in samizdat editions (Petlice, 1973/1974?; Expedice, 1975), and almost ten years later it was

of publishing projects, publishing periodicals and books as a part of the JAZZ PETIT edition, focusing mainly on texts on the theory and history of the arts and on poetry and fiction. It enjoyed some protection against repression from the authorities owing to its membership in the International Jazz Federation, which joined the UNESCO's International Council in 1975. (See "IJF History," <http://www.internationaljazzfederation.org/IJF/default.aspx>, accessed 30 June 2008). Nevertheless, by 1982 the regime was increasing its pressure significantly and issued a 'black list' of prohibited bands, which included those connected to Jazzová sekce. A turning point came with the publication of a legendary article titled "Nová vlna se starým obsahem" (A 'New Wave' with old content) in the dogmatic pro-communist journal *Tribuna* (12/1983), which made reference to specific, mainly young bands, labelling their music as "stupid and brutal, ... opposing all aesthetic and moral norms, ... offending human emotions", and, most importantly, accused them of leading "our youth" towards "apathy, passivity, and resistance against society". After this text was published, most bands than could be linked to the styles of music attacked in the article lost the licences required to perform publicly. In a further attempt to suppress Jazzová sekce, the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Internal Affairs decided to abolish *Svaz hudebníků* (Union of the Musicians), a major institutional body with which Jazzová sekce was affiliated, and since then all of the activities of Jazzová sekce were illegal and its leading members, who continued their cultural public activities, were charged with tax fraud. Out of the people prosecuted in relation to the Jazzová sekce case, five died as a direct consequence of the stress and interrogations, including the 71-year-old treasurer of Jazzová sekce, as well as the owner of the famous 'Domeček', the house where the offices of Jazzová sekce were located. Despite strong international protest signed by key cultural and political figures around the world (e.g. Edward Albee, Madeleine Albright, Charles Alexander, Kingsley Amis, Jean Anouilh, Joan Armatrading, Timothy G. Ash, John Updike, Paul McCartney, Allen Ginsberg, and Simon Rattle), following what was essentially a show trial five leading members of Jazzová sekce were sent to jail in 1986. See the history of Jazzová sekce in Vladimír Kouřil, *Jazzová sekce v čase a nečase 1971 – 1987* [The Jazz Section In and Out of Time 1971–1987], (Prague: Torst, 1999); and a Czech Television documentary available at <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/vysilani/19.06.2008/20856226881-20:00-2-jazzova-sekce.html> (accessed 30 June 2008).

published by exile houses (Index, Köln am Rhein, 1980) and in French translation in Paris in 1981.⁴⁵

In addition to the samizdat and exile editions of the novel, it was the French translation published in Paris in 1981 that resulted in the authorities trying to put further pressure on Hrabal for supposedly allowing his texts to be illegally taken out of the country.⁴⁶ Representatives of Jazzová sekce offered to publish the novel as a part of their series *Jazz petit* and it was released with a print run of 5000 copies in April of 1982.⁴⁷ However, this was followed by another series of interrogations of Hrabal by the Secret Police and the persecution of key representatives of the organisation.⁴⁸ The first official

⁴⁵ Even the exact date of the samizdat release of this novel appears to be a mystery. Gruntorád (2006) corrects Mazal (2004) in his assumption based on older bibliographies that *I Served the King of England* was released in 1974, and he argues that there are earlier Petlice editions of the book in the *Libri Prohibiti* collection. The overall physical appearance of the volumes, including the paper size and the specific type of binding, indicates that they may have been produced in the earliest period of Petlice's existence, i.e. late 1972 or early 1973. Vaculík used to number his titles, but instead of numbering the volumes themselves, he would compile lists of titles retroactively, sometimes as much as two years after publication. As a result, his numbering does not always match the actual publication dates of certain texts. Moreover, two or three texts could have been submitted to Petlice at approximately the same time and thus have been copied simultaneously, which made exact numbering even more challenging. Some of the typists' achievements were remarkable, for *I Served the King of England*, would have been typed simultaneously by five individuals, each of them producing 10 copies in the course of two weeks.

⁴⁶ Bohumil Hrabal, *Moi qui ai servi le roi d'Angleterre* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1981).

⁴⁷ See T. Mazal (2004), 321, 416. Given the restricted access to printing facilities and the regulations on paper allocation that Jazzová sekce constantly struggled with, the printing was done – owing to a set of bizarre coincidences – in the state prison of Pankrác.

⁴⁸ One of them was the founding members and the chairman of Jazzová sekce Karel Šrp, who also served as the main editor of its publications, including Hrabal's work. As part of the persecution of the members of Jazzová sekce he was imprisoned for two years in 1986. In the summer of 1999 the local media (e.g. *Lidové noviny* 22 July 1999, *Týden* 23 August 1999) published evidence that during the period of 1976–1982 he was registered as a confidant and agent of the Secret Police (StB). (See, for example, a news report of 16 August 1999 at <http://archiv.radio.cz/news/CZ/1999/16.08.html>, accessed 30 June 2008) According to the Czech Press Agency, Šrp denied cooperation with the StB (22 July 1999; Time of release: 19:08; ID: 19990722F02968) and in December 2000 the City Court of Prague 1 issued a decision that his registration in the StB files was ungrounded (22.04.2005, 18:20 UTC in <http://www.radio.cz/cz/zpravy/65787>, accessed 30 June 2008). Some former representatives of the alternative culture, such as the exiled protest songwriter and fiction writer Jaroslav Hutka, continued to insist that they had been harmed by Šrp's reports to the StB. See Jana Machalická, "Kryla zaskočila láska publika" (Kryl was Taken Aback by the Public's Love), an interview with Jaroslav Hutka, in: http://www.lidovky.cz/ln-rozhovory.asp?c=A070115_120223_ln_rozhovory_znk. (accessed 20 June 2008).

publication of the novel was as part of an edited collection *Tři novely* (Three Novels), for which Hrabal had signed the publishing contract with Československý spisovatel in June 1988, and which was then published with a massive print run of 190,000 copies just two months before November 1989.⁴⁹

The next question surrounding Hrabal's controversial, widely discussed and visible return to official publishing is the readers' reception of his work. This is one of the most difficult questions to answer, as nearly no data exist to back it up. One attempt to address this question was made by Aleš Haman in his contribution to the *Hrabaliana* volume, where he presented some more results from the above-mentioned research project conducted at the State Library in 1982–1985.⁵⁰ Again, it must be emphasised that, despite the fact that – as Haman pointed out – every fifth citizen of the country was using a public library, a library user should be seen as a specific social category, and even more so in the Czech reading context of the 1970s and 1980s.⁵¹ This specific context was defined by a traditional emphasis on accumulating books in private libraries, and books that carried the symbolic capital of 'forbidden bestsellers' (to use Robert Darnton's term) would have been particularly attractive.⁵² In other words, it could be assumed, although

⁴⁹ In addition to *I Served the Kind of England*, this volume includes two texts from the 1960s: *Ostře sledované vlaky* [Closely Watched Trains] and *Taneční hodiny pro starší a pokročilé* [Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age]. For a brief account of the publication history of the novel, see Bibliographical Notes to the critical edition in: Bohumil Hrabal, *Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále*, Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala, Vol. 7 (Prague: Pražská Imaginace, 1993), 282.

⁵⁰ Aleš Haman, "Hrabal a čtenáři" [Hrabal and Readers], in Milan Jankovič and Josef Zumr, eds. (1990), 181–184.

⁵¹ Available data on the number of public library users in the population vary significantly. Haman based his estimated 20% on the assumption – which the questionnaires of the 1980s survey confirmed – that borrowed books are usually shared by more than one family member. The research results of a project conducted in municipal libraries in the late 1960s suggested that over one-third of the population was registered at some type of library, but among those registered at municipal libraries there was a relatively high proportion of persons under the age of 15 in relation to adults (40:60), while their ratio in population was much lower (20:80). The survey results also pointed out the "very serious fact" that manual workers made up the smallest share of municipal library goers (26%) while they constituted nearly 55% of the population. A project called "Výzkum společenské funkce knihoven" (Research on the Social Function of Libraries) was conducted in 1966–1970 in two phases, the first one focused on libraries in villages and the second one on city libraries. See Dalibor Vančura and Mirko Velinský, *Knihovny a čtenáři ve městech* [Libraries and Readers in the Cities], (Prague: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1973), 84, 66, 67.

⁵² On another occasion Haman noted that a "high proportion of library goers" own home libraries with 100–500 volumes. See Aleš Haman, "Poslání veřejné knihovny při

it is difficult to prove empirically, that given how many of Hrabal's books were already available on the official book market during the early 1980s, the readers who would have demanded his texts most would have perhaps made a special effort in order to be in possession of some of these volumes rather than relying on public libraries to guarantee access to them.

Hrabal's *Postřižiny* (Cutting It Short) scored as the ninth 'most interesting' book according to Czech library-goers in the 1980s, next to the more traditional historical fiction,⁵³ such as *F.L. Věk* by Alois Jirásek, a 19th-century patriotic fiction writer highly promoted by Marxist and communist critics as part of the national literary canon.⁵⁴ The next most popular were Mika T. Waltari's *The Egyptian* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, as well as work by Agatha Christie and *Spartakus* by Jarmila Loukotková, whose highly readable grand historical narratives were very popular among readers across generations.⁵⁵ Discussing the reception of Hrabal's work, Haman refers to another survey conducted in 1983, which examined the most

estetické výchově obyvatelstva', [The Mission of a Public Library in the Aesthetic Education of the Population], in *Knihy a čtenáři* [Books and Readers], (Prague: SK ČSR, Sektor výzkumu a metodiky knihovnictví, 1987), 13–39, 36.

⁵³ Haman attributes the relatively high ranking of Hrabal's texts to the popularity of the film adaptation of his book *Postřižiny* by Jiří Menzel, which was released in 1980. He also notes that the text is based on references to Hrabal's own childhood, and thus may have matched the preferences of the reading audience, which clearly favoured historical texts.

⁵⁴ Jirásek's texts were also on the list of compulsory readings at primary and secondary schools, so the data on their library circulation may not necessarily reflect actual reader preferences. His titles continued to top the lists of the most frequently borrowed books throughout the 2000s, in part no doubt because they are still part of compulsory school reading to date. This trend was confirmed by the statistics conducted at the Prague Municipal Library (Městská knihovna) and not even "Harry Potter had managed to overtake him". See Jaroslava Štěrbová (Municipal Library of Prague) in a debate on *Národní paměť* (National Memory), ČRo 6 (Czech Radio 6), recorded on 7 April 2005, broadcast 10 May 2005, transcript available on the website of Obec spisovatelů (the Society of Czech Writers): http://www.obecspisovatelů.cz/dokoran/dokoran_35/dokoran_35.htm, accessed 30 June 2008.

⁵⁵ For example, the Czech translation of *The Egyptian* [Egypt'an Sinuhet] was released for the first time in 1965, and three more editions were published in the course of the 1980s ('84, '85, '89) with a total print run of 195,000. *Spartacus*, the well-known story of the Roman leader of a slave rebellion, a theme in accordance with the guidelines of the dominating Marxist ideology, was first published in 1950. Its third edition came out in two parts (1980, 1982) with a total print run of 203 000 copies. Just one collection of Agatha Christie's stories (*Muž v mlze: 20 detektivních povídek* – A Man in the Fog: 20 Detective Stories, edited and translated by Jan Zábrana) came out in two editions between 1977 and 1987, with a total print run of 290 000 copies.

frequently borrowed books in twenty Czech libraries. Here Hrabal's *Městečko u vody* (1982) with Československý spisovatel occupied the seventh position. Five years later, in 1988, the team conducted another large-scale survey of book-borrowing from public libraries, which included data on the 4000 most frequently borrowed titles, as well as the least borrowed ones, and Hrabal ranked 30th out of the 49 'most successful' authors and 23rd out of the top 31 Czech authors.⁵⁶ In other words, though appreciated by library-goers, Hrabal was not the most popular author among library goers, unlike, for example, Radek John and Stanislav Rudolf, both authors of novels targeting mainly teenage readers. Their easy-to-read texts, which often included an aspect of social criticism, though within the limits set by the dominant ideology, ranked much higher than Hrabal's, not only in the reading surveys, but also in terms of the number of printed volumes available to readers in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁷

The State Library also examined the reading preferences of public library-goers in the years 1989–1991, but with a slightly altered team and methodology. This constituted a major attempt to monitor reading patterns in the immediate post-1989 period of decentralisation and privatisation of book production.⁵⁸ In this survey, Hrabal is not even among the top twenty-three most frequently borrowed authors in 1989, and while in 1990 he ranks seventh, ahead of Havel (11th) and Kundera (25th), in 1991 none of these names are on the list of the top

⁵⁶ The circulation of particular titles and authors was then defined on the basis of the frequency of borrowings, the number of borrowed items, the number of titles available in particular libraries, and the number of libraries who reported matching the data on frequency of borrowings of particular authors. From the data acquired in this way it was possible to identify the approximately 150 authors who ranked among those most borrowed from at least one third of the 21 monitored libraries. See Haman (1990), 181–182.

⁵⁷ For example, one of Rudolf's novels targeting teenage girls, *Něžně háčkový čas* [Gently Crocheted Time], came out in three editions between 1973 and 1983 with a total print run of 145,000. Radek John's *Memento* - a novel devoted to the socially sensitive, but rather taboo topic of drug addiction - was first published in 1986 (20 000), and in 1987 a second edition came out along with a reprint, resulting in a total print run of 110 000. Rudolf's texts, such as *Metráček*, [Quintal-et] a story of an overweight girl who has to overcome difficulties integrating into the community of her peers, were also adapted for film: the first part in 1969, and its continuation in 1977.

⁵⁸ This study was part of a project titled "The Reception and Function of Literary Texts in the Development of Society", Grant No. 95 615. See Aleš Haman, "Výzkum čtenářské recepce krásné literatury v letech 1989 – 1991," [Reading Research of the Reception of Belles-lettres During 1989–1991], *Česká literatura* 41/4 (1993): 426–445.

twenty-five authors. Haman noted in his analyses of that three-year period that fourteen (i.e. 80%) out of the seventeen most frequently borrowed authors were also present in the surveys of 1986–1988, but Hrabal was not on that list either.⁵⁹ A complementary picture is provided by a different set of data, compiled at the Prague Municipal Library, according to which Czech 19th-century classics (Alois Jirásek, Jan Neruda, Karel Jaromír Erben) continued to top the lists of the most frequently borrowed books even in 2007, while the heavily edited text of *Tři novely* (Three Novels) released by Československý spisovatel in 1989 still ranked in the 6th position in January 2007 and between the 7th and 9th in February 2007. But in May or August of the same year, Hrabal was absent from the top ten, even though his texts were included on the mandatory school reading lists throughout the 1990s and 2000s.⁶⁰

The data on the rather conservative reading preferences of local library-goers, seem to provide yet more evidence of the relative continuity in people's performances that accompanied the rather radical process of institutional discontinuity in book production in this period. At the same time, though, it was this reading audience that Hrabal wanted to address and he was willing to sacrifice a great deal in order to achieve this goal. Whether this desire to be read was also about a strong need for recognition or, as Jirous and others suggested, a sense of anxiety combined with cowardice and weakness, is up to his biographers and literary historians to decide. From the perspective of book studies, however, Hrabal's publishing story offers a unique example of a simultaneous inter-textual co-existence within various alternative

⁵⁹ Ibid., 430. It is worth noting that these data were collected at the time when Hrabal's work enjoyed a true publishing boom. Beyond the pre-November 190 000 copies of *Tři novely* [Three Novels], twelve titles by Hrabal were released by the former state publishing houses, including Československý spisovatel, Melantrich and Odeon, between 1990 and 1991. It was rather typical of this period and of the unrealistic marketing strategy of these houses that Hrabal's novels were published in print runs of 100 000 (*Něžný barbar* [Tender Barbarian], Odeon, 1990) up to 140 000 (second edition of the *English King* in Československý spisovatel, 1990). Needless to say, the first two volumes of Hrabal's collected works, which Václav Kadlec began to publish in his already legally registered Pražská Imaginace in 1991, were released in much more modest print runs of 5000 to 10 000.

⁶⁰ Data on the "twenty most frequently borrowed books in the category of belles-lettres during the period 1/1 2007-31/1/2007" were kindly provided to me by Jaroslava Štěrbová, librarian of the Municipal Library of Prague in an e-mail correspondence of 25 June 2008. She also pointed out that these data must be viewed in connection with the compulsory school reading lists, current publishing policy, and the number of copies of particular titles available in the library.

institutional frameworks of production and reception, and illustrates the complexity of the centrally controlled cultural system. But it was also the principle behind the narrative strategies he used to apply, often even without pressure from his editors, that made these textual shifts possible. As a result, the continual rewriting, cutting, combining and pasting of parts of texts from one book to another was not driven just by an attempt to meet the reviewers' and editors' commands, sometimes perhaps too eagerly followed. He himself kept articulating the approach to his own texts at numerous occasions, by claiming that his 'writing is just copying'. He insisted that: "my texts cannot be labelled as manuscripts but typescripts ... my texts arise far before they are put into the typewriter, a particular motif keeps returning ... in the night I am visited by images related to this motif [and] it takes months, sometimes even years – I never hurry – before I type them down".⁶¹

On Monday, 3 February 1997, at 2:10 pm, Hrabal was found dead after he fell from the fifth floor of a hospital. The deputy director of the IPVZ hospital, Prof. Pavel Dungl, told the media the story of his tragic fall, saying it probably happened as he was feeding the pigeons. No signs of violence were found on his body, he was apparently completely sane, with no traces of alcohol or drugs in him. The police labelled the case as an 'unfortunate accident'. But the overall impression has been that, as his biographer noted, he "was acting emotionally but with a completely rational intention, which he had carried around for a long time: to achieve self-destruction, demise".⁶² The textual construction of his departure on the wings of pigeons continues to migrate from one account of Hrabal's life to another, but it cannot overshadow his position as a specific and ambiguous example of Cold War and post-Cold War cultural dynamics.⁶³

The publishing stories of Jaroslav Seifert, whose life and work spanned some of the most significant changes in Czech cultural and political history of the 20th century, are yet another example of the complex relationship between the official and alternative book

⁶¹ Quoted in T. Mazal (2004), 218, 215.

⁶² T. Mazal (2004), 29.

⁶³ See, for example: Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton UP, 1998), 265; or James Wood, "Bohumil Hrabal," *London Review of Books* (4 January 2001), in http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n01/wood02_.html (accessed 30 March 2008).

production, particularly during the last two decades of the 'old regime'.⁶⁴ For example, his book of poetry *Morový sloup* (The Plague Column) written in 1968, was being copied illegally three years later (1971, Petlice), and published abroad (1977, London, Boston), and its final version was only completed in 1977, but not published officially until 1981.⁶⁵ Seifert's editor Rudolf Havel argued that publication of the poet's work during the 'normalisation' period was largely brought about by two men – the director and the editor-in-chief of Československý spisovatel, Jan Pilař and Ivan Skála. Both of them were also poets who had published extensively precisely during the first 'normalisation' decade, when new editions of Seifert's older work were being published while his new work was being actively silenced.⁶⁶ The first new, original book of his poetry that made it into print since 1969 was the 1979 edition of *Deštník z Piccadilly* (An Umbrella from Piccadilly; Petlice, 1978), with a relatively generous print run of 5000. Seifert's famous book of memoirs *Všecky krásy světa* (All the Beauty of the World) was to have been published in the late 1970s by Albatros, a house dedicated to juvenile literature, but the manuscript was

⁶⁴ As a young poet Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986) belonged to leftist cultural circles and along with Karel Teige was one of the founding members of the avant-garde artistic movement *Devětsil*, and he worked as a journalist in the Communist Party's key periodical *Rudé právo*. In 1929 he resisted Klement Gottwald's pro-Moscow, anti-democratic hard line in the leadership of the Communist Party and was expelled from the Party as well as from *Devětsil*. Among his major political acts was his presentation at the Second Congress of Czechoslovak Writers in April 1956, where he openly attacked the current cultural policy and especially the political persecution of writers. In 1969 he served as a President of the Union of Czech Writers, which was dissolved in 1970 because of its negative stance on the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops into the country. During the 1970s, what appeared in official publishing were mostly reprints of his older work, while Seifert's controversial relationship with the 'normalisation' regime worsened further after he signed 'Charter 77'. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1984. Seifert could certainly be seen as a major Czech poet and cultural figure. See Zdeněk Pešat, *Jaroslav Seifert* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1991). For a recent English edition of Seifert's work see: *The Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert*, Translated by Ewald Osers, North Haven, CT: Catbird Press, 1998.

⁶⁵ Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1981. The first edition in English of *The Plague Column* was Ewald Osers's translation based on the samizdat version and published by Terra Nova Editions Ltd. in London, 1979.

⁶⁶ Rudolf Havel, "O jedné legendě. Z rukopisného sborníku Zdenku Pešatovi k šedesátinám (1987)" [On a Legend. From the Manuscript Volume to the 60th Birthday of Zdeněk Pešat] *Tvar* 47–48 (1993): 7. Just in the course of 1969–1979, i.e. when Seifert's new original work was not being officially published, there were released four new books of poetry by Pilař plus two collections of his older poems and translations, while Skála published four new books and four collections of older texts.

shuffled from one house to another and its release was intentionally postponed for several years, despite assurances from the authorities that it would be published.⁶⁷

The publisher's archives reveal at least a part of the story of this book, and again demonstrate the practices of command-system publishing.⁶⁸ In a letter of 27 February 1981 the editor-in-chief of Odeon publishers wrote Pilař and diplomatically told him that "some time ago" Jaroslav Seifert had approached Odeon with a request to publish his memoirs, and with just a hint of sarcasm he noted that the manuscript "had been glimpsed at by" several governing institutions, which took approximately three years. He further summed up that a literary scholar, Štěpán Vlašín, had reviewed the manuscript, the poet Vilém Závada was also willing to send his comments, and the house had been planning to publish the book in 1982, but a few days earlier he had "received a phone call from comrade deputy Otakar Holan with the instruction to pass the manuscript over to your [Pilař's] house". The tone of the letter suggests that the sender was anything but happy with this course of events, but had no choice except to follow the – orally delivered, unwritten – instructions. While the texts by the internal reviewers (Pilař, Skála) are missing from the files, a 'record of the negotiations with the author' includes a note stating: "Dr. Pilař talked to the author on the phone as well as in person ... about the alteration and the editor Dr. Havel also consulted the author continually". Here the reference to a 'talk on the phone and in person' may actually refer to Pilař mercilessly attacking Seifert, as Seifert later confided to Havel, but this is certainly not clear from the records.

Seifert's files include both of Vlašín's reviews, the original one of 1976 and the one from 1981, and these texts (three to four pages each)

⁶⁷ It was Jan Fojtík, the Ideological Secretary of the Party, who according to Havel continued to claim that the publication was 'almost for sure' about to happen. Jan Fojtík (*1928) served as the Ideological Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party during 1969–1989, and as such was largely responsible for the management of propagandistic, cultural, academic and media-related matters during the 'normalisation' era. Among the top Party members, he represented a dogmatic and orthodox trend and was known for his stubborn resistance to any manifestations of Perestroika in the Czechoslovak context. See "Jan Fojtík" at http://www.totalita.cz/vysvetlivky/o_fojtikj.php, accessed 20 June 2008.

⁶⁸ Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví (LAPNP - Literary Archive of the Muzeum of Czech Literature), location Zámek Staré Hradky. File "Československý spisovatel" - "Jaroslav Seifert".

provide an illustrative example of the judgemental discourse characteristic of the period. The reviewer appreciated the poet's substantial knowledge of and personal links to the key figures of Czech culture and the arts of the twentieth century and valued most the sections referring to the "poor childhood of the proletarian boy". As such he considered the memoirs "definitely worth publishing", but suggested making a number of "editorial interventions" that would "free the manuscript of unnecessary errors and irritating places". Besides some apparent formal defects, such as repetitions of stories and motifs and factual inaccuracies, and some structural issues, like the idea of organising the individual stories chronologically, the reviewer suggested deleting the 'spooky' parts of the text and the parts "overly driven by the religious faith", such as the story of "a dead grandma [who] opened the door to a drunk poet and then died again". He also recommended removing references to several specific names, such as Milan Kundera and Roman Jakobson ("with a question mark"), as well as one of Seifert's stories about trying to get rid of his dog by locking him up in a phone booth, as it "would not give a good impression if an influential poet were to provide such an example".

The reviewer also noted that occasionally Seifert's stories take on the 'unpleasant' form of "rumours from the literary society" and asked whether "Seifert really has to serve the nation this kind of erotic gossip". Also, "frequent stories about drinking bouts" may give the impression that "this was a generation of busters, drunkards, and womanisers". Such stories, the reviewer stressed, overshadow the fact that this was also an "exceptionally hard-working generation", as Seifert's own work clearly proves. At the same time, he suggested removing an 'ironic remark' about Vaculík's *Two Thousands Words* and provided a rather sarcastic explanation: "the author may find odd but during the period of overcoming the crisis [of 1968] society had to eliminate those who stood at the frontline of the counter-revolutionary movement". He also highlighted a section that he considered to be "a certain metaphorical self-criticism of [the author's] activities in the critical year of 1968". The reviewer concluded with some self-explanatory lines suggesting that if all the "contentious parts" are removed it "shall be possible" to publish the memoirs for their "factual as well as literary value". The reviewer claimed that the "social impact" of the book was to be positive, as it "shall put an end to the cloudiness and legends surrounding the poet's personality. Seifert's work cannot be written out of the history of Czech

socialist literature – despite his political lapses”.⁶⁹ Finally, after already being published by exile houses (68 Publishers in Toronto, Index in Köln in 1981), the text was published by Československý spisovatel in 1982, with substantial interventions in the text by Pilař, such as deleting the names that might have evoked unwanted political connotations.⁷⁰

Clearly, the rhetoric used in the reviews was not just a reflection of the given author’s position in the system, but also an indicator of the prevailing discourse at any given period. Vlašín’s texts on *Všecky krásy světa* should be read against the background of the entire body of texts in the publisher’s file on Seifert, which approximately covers the period of 1961–1988. Even these sparse resources exhibit very significant discursive shifts, be it in the reviews, both internal and external, or in the correspondence with the poet. Thus, on 31 August 1961, the executive editor wrote Seifert a very respectful and polite letter saying “we thank you sincerely for your poems on Prague [however] due to limits on paper that we are unable to exceed, we would like to ask you dearly – although it cannot be particularly pleasant for you and isn’t for us either – if you could kindly let us know which verses you would consider for elimination. I do hope that you will not be angry with us for torturing you this way”.⁷¹ Another example is an (unsigned) internal review of the second edition of the book *Osm dní* (Eight Days), which Seifert wrote to honour the legacy of first president of Czechoslovakia, T. G. Masaryk, and which was originally published in 1937. In 1968 the reviewer noted that “this is a collection of verses inspired by the death of TGM, ... for years it was banned from publishing and thus there will be a lot of interest in the new edition”, and he highlighted the fact that the book “honours a great man and a democrat”.⁷² Sentences like

⁶⁹ All the quotations come from the second review of 1981. The arguments presented in the texts of both reviews (1976, 1981) essentially match, although the later one is more detailed and includes more concrete suggestions on what to remove. This also applies to the size of the manuscripts – as the reviewer himself noted – as the second one was one-third longer than the original one from the mid-1970s. At the same time, some relevant statements are missing from the second text, including the very patronising argument he uses to support the publication: “eight years have already passed since Seifert’s political involvement, so a little bit of generosity would be appropriate”. See LAPNP: Ibid.

⁷⁰ It came out with a print run of 20 000, while the second edition in 1985 had a print run of 50 000 copies.

⁷¹ From correspondence dating from 1961 relating to the publication of *Verše o Praze* [Verses on Prague], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1962). In LAPNP: Ibid.

⁷² From the editorial records of 1968 relating to the publication of *Osm dní* [Eight Days], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1968). In LAPNP: Ibid.

‘Dear Master ... we are so sorry to have to trouble you with this again and deeply apologise for having tortured you so much’ are found in a letter proposing to change the book cover design for *Morový sloup* in 1971.⁷³

Things would soon change, both at the level of discourse and editorial practices, as is apparent in several more letters from 1971. There is a ten-line, hand-written letter from the poet himself, dated 25 April 1971, addressed to the ‘publisher Čsl. Spisovatel’, where Seifert writes: “Dear comrades, ... could you please let me know when you will send me the proofs of my new book of poems *Morový sloup*. I am getting ready to leave for a long treatment.” The reply to this was a two-sentence letter addressed to Seifert dated 2 July of the same year signed with the initials J. R.: “Dear Master, ... we apologise for the delay in replying. Concerning the proofs of your book *Morový sloup*, we would like to advise you that for the time being the book has been removed from the plan for 1971.”⁷⁴ Ten years later, when the book was reconsidered for publication, one of the editors wrote in an apologetic tone that it was not easy to write about new verses by a poet “who himself already represents history”. Nevertheless, Seifert’s “philosophy is positive; it certainly is missing something, but is positive nonetheless”. It must be noted that fellow poets in the positions of editors and reviewers largely tried to maintain a dignified attitude to Seifert’s work even during the 1970s. In the reviews of the first edition of *Deštník z Piccadilly* (1979), which was the first book of Seifert’s published since 1969 that was not a reprint, we read that it “ranks among the most beautiful and profound of the author’s books” (the external reviewer was the poet of Seifert’s generation Vilém Závada). Jiří Žáček (a poet and at the time the house’s executive editor) wrote “I cannot but thank the poet [for his verses] very much”. In 1981, however, the documents related to the second amended edition of *Deštník z Piccadilly* (1981) state that “the additional six poems were read by Dr. Pilař and he will discuss one minor change with J. Seifert personally.”⁷⁵ These lines, like the correspondence accompanying the lengthy production process of *Všecky*

⁷³ From the editorial records of 1971 and 1979–1982 relating to the publication of *Morový sloup* [The Plague Monument], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1981). In LAPNP: Ibid.

⁷⁴ LAPNP: Ibid.

⁷⁵ From the editorial records of 1979 relating to the publication of *Deštník z Piccadilly* [Umbrella from Piccadilly], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1979). In LAPNP: Ibid.

krásy světa, are indicative of a substantial shift in the publisher's style of communication with the author, away from the more respectful tone they used in the 1960s and towards a more interventional approach, imposing more and more constraints on the author's subjectivity and on his space to exercise control over his own texts.

According to the editor Havel, Pilař used to visit Seifert regularly at home or in the hospital when he was old and ill, combining promises with harassment and vulgar insults, particularly after Seifert signed the Charter 77 document. In private, when Pilař wanted to obtain Seifert's approval of some matter, he used offensive methods of persuasion. Havel quotes some of the complaints Seifert shared with him after a recent meeting with Pilař: "if you knew how he shouted at me, as if I were a boy".⁷⁶ According to Havel, in 1984, when Seifert's nomination for the Nobel Prize was being prepared, Pilař visited the poet in the hospital and made him sign an exclusive contract to publish his poetry with Československý spisovatel. At the same time, the somewhat inconsistent and confused reaction of the literary and political leadership to Jaroslav Seifert's winning the Nobel Prize in 1984 and then – perhaps even more so – to his massively attended funeral at Břevnov Monastery and in Kralupy nad Vltavou in January 1986, which grew into a silent but unambiguous demonstration of disapproval of the regime, represented yet more evidence of the diminishing capacity of those in power to control society and its culture. And yet even just before the Velvet Revolution Pilař declared: "Seifert? The admiration for him was just a fever that is bound to go away. At this year's Frankfurt Book Fair I didn't see a single book or photograph of his."⁷⁷

Pilař nonetheless proudly presented Seifert's official publications as his own achievement. In his book of memoirs *Sluneční hodiny* (Sundial), Pilař wrote that someone had remarked on how he "likes to vaunt his friendship" with the poet. But Pilař claimed that for him the friendship was not a pretence, "as it was for many people on the other side" (meaning politically different from the one Pilař occupied). It was "real, honest, strong, long, and reciprocated."⁷⁸ He speaks to those who – probably quite rightly – accused him of impeding the

⁷⁶ R. Havel (1993), 7.

⁷⁷ Pavel Frýbort and Ondřej Neff, "Pramen naší literatury nevysychl," [The Springs of Our Literature Have Not Dried Out], an interview with Jan Pilař, in *Kmen* II(VIII)/2 (1989), 4.

⁷⁸ Jan Pilař, *Sluneční hodiny* [Sundial], (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1989), 425.

publication of Seifert's work: "these false 'friends' of his tried, indeed, very hard to discredit me in his eyes and drive me off the doorstep of his house". But Pilař claims to have plenty of evidence proving that he "as both, journalist and publisher always struggled to get his work published", something that "was not always easy in different times". "I was fighting for his work", Pilař writes judgementally, "for I was convinced his work was progressive, despite the fact that the poet was being taken away from the straight journey" (again, meaning politically different from the 'straight' one Pilař followed).

Pilař's narrator is not only omniscient but also forgiving, and he looks very benevolently at Seifert, who "was neither a philosopher nor an intellectual" and whose "political views were rather naïve [for] he often allowed himself to get easily seduced by directions he did not even want to follow". Particularly in the light of Rudolf Havel's comments on Pilař's fierce treatment of the old, ill poet, some of his statements balance on the edge of a personal assault when he claims that "Seifert liked it when he was honoured, and in the winy inebriation he was signing anything they gave him to sign". In fact, the legendary literary figure is portrayed as a victim, not only of the "unbelievable intrigues that wanted to turn the Czech poet into the spokesperson of domestic and foreign opposition", but also of the local barriers to book production. And Pilař does not fail to remind his readers, in self-celebratory rhetoric, that most of Seifert's books were published by Československý spisovatel "without any interruption even when the poet was surrounded by silence".⁷⁹ Despite the fact that he was not the owner, but just a manager of a public institution whose mission was to "break the internal barriers that divided writers and the people",⁸⁰ as he himself put it on another occasion, Pilař, using the first person, goes on to say confidently: "I even managed to publish two of his books, which have been held back as manuscripts for a long time", i.e. *Morový sloup* and *Všecky Krásy Světa* (The Plague Monument, All the Beauty of the World). Leaving aside the fact that he himself was an integral (and, as his former colleagues' testimonies proved, a very active) part of those institutional barriers and pressures he claims to have heroically

⁷⁹ Ibid., 428.

⁸⁰ Quoted from Pilař's Introduction to a special publication celebrating the fortieth anniversary of Československý spisovatel. See Jan Pilař, "Úvodník," in *40 let práce pro českou literaturu: 1949–1989* [Forty Years of Work for Czech Literature: 1949–1989], edited by Olga Hrivňáková, (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1989), 12.

struggled with, the complex relationship between Seifert and his publisher/fellow-poet can shed some light on the 'normalisation' era of the publishing establishment after 1968, a process in which Pilař played a prominent role.⁸¹

Pilař's memoirs, published literally just before the collapse of the establishment he had co-constructed, deserve some more attention, as they illuminate the context of the second half of the 1980s, a time pregnant with change and yet a time when the status quo was performatively maintained. His narrator is presented as a liberal, non-demagogical member of the cultural elite, who is generously willing to tolerate the 'failures' of others. This 'liberal' trend is most apparent in a section entitled 'A Small Gallery of Key Authors' which offers brief and rather personalised portraits of major Czech writers with whom he in one way or another came into contact. He comments not only on clear-cut communist protégé authors (Jarmila Glazarová, Jiří Taufer) but also and especially on authors with a very controversial relationship to communist ideology and the regime, including key personalities of the pre-war democratic republic whose careers continued into the post-1948 period (exiled Jiří Voskovec, Jan Werich, Vladimír Holan, Jan Mukařovský). Nonetheless, his text is full of empty phrases and clichés, not unlike the discourse of the 1950s, clichés that are even more striking given the growing tendency to de-ideologise public discourse that was apparent even in the official media of that period. For example, a female author of realistic prose, Jarmila Glazarová, was represented as "a kind of advocate of the oppressed and the handicapped", who "did

⁸¹ From the testimony of his former colleagues, rank editors at the publishing house, Pilař comes out as indeed a well-connected professional with publishing experience dating back to before 1948, a person committed to and heavily corrupted by the regime, but also someone who himself was under constant supervision from the highest places. For example, while most editors would have been appointed on an open-ended contract, his was reviewed and (with the approval of the Central Committee of the Party) renewed on a yearly basis. His relationship with Seifert had a long history, which even included a certain level of mutual sympathy, stemming mainly from the period before 1948 and the wild nights the poets enjoyed together in Prague wineries, and perhaps also from Seifert's slightly short-sighted tendency to uncritically praise younger but undoubtedly less talented poets, particularly during the war era; his first book of poetry *Jabloňový sad* [Apple Orchard] came out in 1939 on the eve of the Second World War. This legacy not only established Pilař's everlasting sense of belonging in the same company as a national icon of poetry, a sense that, especially after the events of 1968, could hardly have been further from reality, but it also might have given him the legitimacy to treat Seifert as a good old – though 'politically blind' – peer. Ladislav Verecký, in an e-mail message to this author, 11 February 2008.

not understand writing as a job, but a tool to serve the people”.⁸² He refers to the year 1946, a time when the influence of the communists was growing, especially in the sphere of cultural policy, as “the best years for fiction writers whatsoever”. At that time, Glazarová, who “was melting like sugar in a cup of tea in her work for society”, and “loved the Soviet Union” was appointed culture attaché to Moscow by the Minister of Information Václav Kopecký. In this way, Kopecký “executed the idea that writers should take part in the Cultural Revolution”, as “his ministry was packed with writers”, and that was quite literally a fact.⁸³

This book of memoirs of a publisher was just one of many other sources that provide a noteworthy demonstration of the corrosion of the entire system of central control but also of its desperate attempt to ensure the continuity of the established discourses. Another example of these trends is found in a special publication commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Československý spisovatel, which is interesting less for what it tells about goings on at this publishing house, and more for the way in which these events and their actors are represented, and, most importantly, which of the house’s main authors are selected to represent its legacy. It presents a collage of dogmatic statements and purportedly liberal political comments. So on the one hand it contains somewhat archaic notes, like “it was a revolutionary achievement ... when after February [1948] a publishing house was established that allowed the writers themselves to construct their own editorial conception free of the impact of commercialisation”.⁸⁴ The wife of the house’s first director after 1949 Václav Řezáč is quoted as saying (in a somewhat stereotypically gendered fashion) that all she could contribute to the house’s operation was “to make sure everything is all right at home”, but she added, “...with all my soul I stood by a company that was to achieve goals we could only have dreamed of in the past. Yes, yes, yes, that was it: to publish modern and progressive literature, to provide the reading public with the best of the best”.

⁸² J. Pilař (1989), 368–269.

⁸³ It was not just the Publishing Division of the Ministry of Information that was headed by a poet, František Halas, but its Radio Broadcasting Division was led by the prose writer Ivan Olbracht, the Film Division was headed by the poet Vítězslav Nezval, and, for example, the Division for the Promotion of the Arts was headed by the writer Josef Toman. See Jiří Knapík, “Organizace ministerstva informací k červnu 1948,” [Organisation of the Ministry of Information as of June 1948] in Jiří Knapík, *V zajetí moci. Kulturní politika: její systém a aktéři 1948–1956* [In the Grip of Power. Cultural Policy: Its System and Actors 1948–1956], (Prague: Libri, 2006), 376–378.

⁸⁴ J. Pilař, “Úvodník,” (1989), 12.

As far who the publishing house's representative authors were, Jan Werich, the legendary comedian and dramatist of the inter-war period, is quoted here in an undated letter to Pilař, where Werich asks about a contract for an edition of his and his exiled artistic partner Jiří Voskovec's plays: "In the meantime, keep well, and do please arrange it somehow. You have all these influential acquaintances who command the wind and the rain, so let's at least make the end of the summer democratic, indeed, as far the whether is concerned".⁸⁵ Werich's semi-ironic reference to commanding the wind and the rain, a famous slogan used by Stalinists in the 1950s, would probably not have been inserted into any public text, and Pilař would perhaps not have approved publication of this quote, say, five years earlier. The 'liberal' image of this publishing house, however, apparently had its limits. While more authors with – from the regime's perspective – a questionable past are mentioned (Hrabal, Seifert) in the book, many others are omitted, including all the key authors from the 1960s that ended up in exile. There is not a single reference to Milan Kundera, who, during the period of extreme popularity he enjoyed in his homeland (1953–1970) – a popularity he chose to silence by portraying himself as a "relatively unknown Czech intellectual" in the Western media after he went to exile – published over twenty books in the house (including re-editions); the three editions of *Žert* (The Joke) alone had a total print run of 127 000 copies.⁸⁶ Josef Škvorecký was also absent from the book commemorating Československý spisovatel, as was any discussion of the three editions of his *Zbabělci* (Cowards), published with a total print run of 100 000.⁸⁷ Nor was any mention made of the relatively

⁸⁵ Quoted in *40 let práce pro českou literaturu...*, (1989). The letter would most likely have been written in the period of Pilař's first term serving as director, i.e. between 1959 and 1968. Edited collections of Werich's and Voskovec's plays were published in Československý spisovatel in various editions with a total print run of 189,000 copies.

⁸⁶ Kundera cited from "In Defence of Intimacy," Milan Kundera interviewed by Philip Roth, *London Times Magazine* (20 May 1984): 49–51. Literary critic Milan Jungmann noted in an essay written for samizdat in 1985: "those who used to know Milan Kundera in the 1950s and the 1960s, can hardly recognise him in this account. The self-portrait has been retouched in such a way that Kundera's real appearance has vanished. Everything essential that formed Kundera's image as a leading intellectual of the past few decades of Czech history has been suppressed." Milan Jungmann, "Kunderian Paradoxes (1985)," in M. Goetz-Stankiewicz, ed., (1992), 153–159; 155.

⁸⁷ Kundera's *Žert* was first published in 1967 (30 000 copies), a second edition followed a year later (35 000) and a third one in 1969 (52 000). Following the first scandalous edition of Škvorecký's *Zbabělci* in 1958 (10 000), which cost the author and

modest but still highly significant publication in 1958 of 10 000 copies of the first Czech translation of Franz Kafka's *Der Prozess* by Pavel Eisner.

Although this book would be crushed beneath the wheels of history within just a few months with the onset of the boom in independent publishing that subsequently occurred, the story it tells is revealing. The discourse the house used to represent itself positions Československý spisovatel as the saviour and protector of Czech literature, and definitely not as an institutional gate-keeper preventing local readers from access to 'harmful' texts and authors. The guardian of Czech literature does not betray its 'progressive' social and political mission (framed in almost neo-Stalinist rhetoric), but is benevolent towards those who (temporarily) failed (Hrabal, Seifert), allows them the occasional joke about the establishment (Werich), but eliminates everything that does not fit the image of itself that it has created. The readers thus learn that the books with the largest print runs included Jan Drda's *České pohádky* (Czech Fairytales – 622 000), Jaroslav Hašek's *Švejk* (The Good Soldier Švejk – 560 000), and Marie Majerová's story for teenage girls *Robinsonka* (556 000). The discourse of achievement is further enforced by comparisons with the dull past of commercial publishing. Thus, for example, Karel Čapek is cited as the author with the largest number of volumes published by the house (91 titles with a total print run of 3 325 000), while the usual print run of Čapek's books by Borový publishers – as the booklet reminds its readers – was 3000. Hašek ranked third on the list of most-published authors (1 948 000 copies), and although no information is provided about the volumes by the authors out of favour (Kundera, etc.), Hrabal and Seifert are mentioned here, each with around one million copies.⁸⁸

It is also possible to trace a paternalistic attitude in the house's behaviour towards its authors and their books. For example, in correspondence with the author Vladimír Páral, a writer whose works sold well, Páral is essentially presented – in a slightly humoresque fashion – as someone who came to the house with imperfect manuscripts, received good advice from his editors, and with their help was made into a

Ladislav Fikar (at that time the director of the house) their jobs, two more editions were published in 1964 (30 000) and 1966 (60 000). See "Česká národní bibliografie," <http://sigma.nkp.cz/F/> (accessed 21 September 2008).

⁸⁸ Bohumil Hrabal ranked eleventh (1 104 000 copies) and Jaroslav Seifert fourteenth (995 000). See *40 let práce pro českou literaturu...* (1989).

successful fiction writer.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the archives of Československý spisovatel, tell a somewhat more complex story about the publishing history of his books, which, despite their popularity and generous print runs, encountered detours and obstacles on their journey to reach readers. In the editorial records of 1979 relating to one of his manuscripts (*Muka obraznosti*), an editor named Miloš Pohorský noted blankly: “the views of the reviewers differed significantly”. He also suggested, that “if the tenet of official socialist realism allowing the individual development of an author is still valid, we cannot ask the author to completely change his individual style”. Nonetheless, the records contain six reviews, which cite an almost endless list of shortcomings in Páral texts, including the “predominating sexual motivation of the characters”; “a commercially over-eroticised orientation”; “a lack of ideological motivation on the part of the characters who are displaced from any social relations”; “a pessimistic lack of belief in the power of human potential, a pessimism that does not belong in socialist literature”; and “an continuous tendency to justify the protagonist’s failures”. In the end, in a letter of November 1978 the author was asked to make ninety-seven changes to his work, and the editor’s letter closed with the following sober but potentially chilling words: “stop by, together we shall consider how to rewrite the manuscript in conformity with the comments.”⁹⁰

By the mid-1980s the discourse had begun to shift, and this was particularly apparent in the reviews by younger editors, such as Ladislav Verecký, an editor in the house’ poetry department. His reviews in principle still had to adhere to the house’s editorial policy, and he certainly could not turn down (yet another) book of poetry by his boss Pilař. Nonetheless, while in 1985, for example, Skála – a poet and an external reviewer of Pilař’s books – referred to the author’s “wise and

⁸⁹ For example, Československý spisovatel published Vladimír Páral’s novel *Profesionální žena* [Professional Woman] in two editions (the 1st edition in 1971, 20 000 copies and 3rd edition in 1980, 50 000 copies) and *Muka obraznosti* [The Agony of Imagination] in 1980 with a print run of 50 000. His specific, highly readable, modestly socially critical stories, flavoured with some sexually explicit references, are inhabited by typically constructed, contemporary characters. Páral’s characters are not overburdened by deep psychologising, “but are constructed through an attractively built story written with humour, irony and nearly self-ironical moralist perspective”. See “Páral, Vladimír,” in *Slovník české literatury po roce 1945* [The Dictionary of Czech literature till 1945], Ústav pro českou literaturu ČSAV: <http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/> (accessed 20 September 2008).

⁹⁰ LAPNP - File “Československý spisovatel” – “Vladimír Páral”.

poetically outstanding reflections ... a happy focus on classical humbleness [and] some of the strongest poems [he] had ever read", Verecký in relation to the same text noted in a more realistic fashion: "here more successfully than elsewhere [Pilař] has managed to avoid the high-flying fogginess of purely personal feelings, he is more elliptical and writes a more generous lyrical poetry". In other words, he indirectly but flatly criticised Pilař's poetry from the previous period. Similarly, in his comments to an edition of selected poems by Pilař prepared for publication, the Marxist literary scholar František Buriánek suggested that the main value of the book is not only the "social consciousness" that appeared in the poet's work at a relatively early stage, but also the "awareness of a strong connection with the people". Verecký, however, appreciated the fact that the volume included many texts that "for the first time appeared in the original form that was not crippled by current censoring interventions", in other words, explicitly pointing out – what barely any professional in the field of publishing would have dared to admit a few years earlier – that such 'interventions' existed at all.

On a different occasion, in a "record of negotiations with the author" in 1984 relating to the preparation of yet another book of Pilař's poetry, Verecký writes blankly that the "author personally informed the editorial staff about the instructions from the Ministry of Culture that the volume must be on the market by the end of June. So the manuscript has to be edited immediately, even though there is not a single copy of the text available in the editor's office at the moment". Leaving aside his own inventive style of writing and the undeniable amount of personal courage, most of this editor's reviews reveal the emergence of a discourse different from that used by his older peers and predecessors, a discourse that would not have been acceptable in the early 1980s. While these texts could be seen as a sign of increasing the elasticity of the centrally controlled system of book production at its top institutional levels, the quotes also demonstrate the dispersed nature of decision-making, which lacked any clearly defined and written structure and criteria on which members of the institution could rely, and very often operated on an *ad hoc* basis.

While, as already noted, it was the narrowly defined literary textual production that was the most publicly visible arena in which to observe the prevailing trends in a given period, it is useful to complete the picture with a brief look at another key area of publishing – propaganda and promotional publications. An example is found in such seemingly

neutral documents as the business trip reports completed by employees of the state-operated publishing institution Orbis and submitted during 1987–1989.⁹¹ The purpose of most of these trips was to internationally promote the printed matter produced by Orbis, many of them of a highly propagandistic and political nature. A document called ‘Planned Business Trips for 1989’ included not just the names, office positions, language skills, and so on, of the representatives the publisher sent abroad, but also, even at that time, a note about their Communist Party membership – approximately 80% of those listed in this ‘Plan’ were actually members. These reports were approximately 7–10 pages of single-spaced text. They provide quite detailed accounts of what the Orbis employees did and when they did it, where they stayed, and whom they met on the way. Beyond the practical information these texts provided, they could also be read as a unique combination of official rhetoric on the one hand, and on the other hand as evidence of the decreasing ability of the company to manage its appearance on the international level.

Thus, for example, a report on attendance at the European Nuclear Disarmament meeting in Lund, Sweden, in July 1988, gently contrasted with the absence of any Czech and East German representatives to the attendance of the “Hungarian official delegation as well as groups of independent movements”. Another report from a trip to Italy in September 1987 where Orbis presented its production at the L’Unità Festival (organised by the Italian leftwing newspaper) openly criticised a number of problems with the Orbis’s representative display. According to the author, the design of Orbis’s display stand was clearly out of date, as “the shot of readers holding an issue of *Rudé právo* reporting on the 15th Party Congress (held in 1976) or the traditional image of factory workers displayed on the stand, create now, at a time of scientific and technological revolution, a rather anachronistic impression”. Although there was “quite a bit of interest” in the *Stručné dějiny KSČ* (A Brief History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), which the reporter appreciated, especially due to “L’Unità’s sharply critical attitude towards Czechoslovakia”, Orbis’s stand “suffered from a constant lack of books and periodicals [while] some titles were completely absent, including the badly needed reprints in Italian!” The author of the report also commented on the video presentation Orbis screened

⁹¹ For all these quoted documents, see Národní archiv, “Orbis – Cestovní zprávy. 1987–88” and “Orbis – Cestovní zprávy. 1989” [Travel Reports 1987–1989].

at its stand, noting that it had a “hazy screen” and the images “were useless either due to the lack of technical quality or simply because not a single one was in Italian”. On top of everything else, the stand was “unventilated and without air-condition”.

Another Orbis employee visited the Leipzig Book Fair in East Germany in March of 1988, and he appreciated the opportunity it gave him to explore samples of book production from a variety of countries, since, “no international exhibition of books takes place in the ČSSR”. He noted that the key part of his mission (Orbis did not have its own presentation here, its production was exhibited under the umbrella of the book wholesale company Knižní velkoobchod) was to observe presentations of volumes published specifically for propagandistic purposes and texts addressing international audiences. However, he went on to comment on the qualities, and again, mainly shortcomings of the Czechoslovak presentation that “consisted of two display cases, had no staff member on the premises, and the pile of photography books on display were gone within the first two days”. Neither did he “consider it effective” to present an edited volume on *Militarism and Revanchism*, whose design and printing was “not terribly nice”. While he appreciated that, compared to other “agencies co-operating with us” (i.e. most likely East European agencies), Orbis’s appearance was among the best there, its publications gave off “a dull impression”, partly owing to the “bad situation in the printing industry”. Instead of “fresh publications about real life”, Orbis presented volumes that were “long, declamatory and descriptive”. “Capitalist countries”, on the other hand, presented “attractive titles, always exquisitely printed”, and “their topicality was evidence of their flexible editorial and design approaches”. He referred to *One Day USA*, a book covering the life of American cities over a 24-hour period, and he praised its photographs, the quality of which “does not exceed significantly the level of work of our photographers, but does give a much more earnest impression, are more natural, without losing the propagandistic impact”.

On the other hand, another editor who visited the 33rd International Book Fair in Warsaw a few months later praised the presentations by 35 Czech and 20 Slovak publishers, paying tribute to the “high standards of the printing industry as well as the advanced stage of development of cultural and social life of our nation”. Despite the fact that the Warsaw fair mainly presented East European exhibitors, this editor came to the conclusion that “books published in our country could easily be compared to the high printing standards in socialist as well as

capitalist countries, particularly in the case of art books and books for children". Although she stressed that "our books are much cheaper", she also gently admitted that political publications "would improve standards by introducing more attractive covers and bindings". As late as September 1989, another Orbis employee, after returning from the Volkstimme Festival in Vienna, noted in her report (dated 19 October 1989!) that due to "the aggressive nature of capitalism, the further advancement of the communist movement is more necessary than ever before". She also expressed her satisfaction with the fact that despite recent Austrian media attacks on Czechoslovakia in connection with the anniversary of August 1968 and other developments in the country, "no provocations took place". Nonetheless, according to her report "unrealistic numbers of copies" of books like *Socialist Czechoslovakia* or *A History of American Aggression* were brought to the festival, and the design and print of the books was unremarkable. She also reported that the Orbis stand included just samples of its books and there were no order forms for them, plus the video presentation was of "questionable impact" because of the bad quality of the screen and due to the length of the presented film.

Authors of a report about a trip to the Leipzig Book Fair in March 1989 stated – with a slight tone of regret – that even though this year Orbis had its own presentation, its position was somewhat difficult, for its key mission is the export of printed matter, but most foreign partners were also interested in importing their publications into Czechoslovakia, which Orbis had no authorisation to deal with. In addition, the reporter "admitted" that while the main focus of Orbis's editorial profile was political literature, "a significant part of the production by Western publishers was moving towards professional literature and tourism". These publishers were "adapting themselves to the needs of Western readers, who are becoming more and more a-political, and rather seek to further professional education and show increasing interest in travelling". It was this 'a-political' publishing policy that was "adversely influencing their interest in business contacts with Orbis". Although the stand's art design was good, the exhibited books created an "unattractive impression due to the monotonous covers of individual titles". She also raised the – the apparently interminable – issue of the promotional video and quite blankly referred to it as the "most problematic matter" of the presentation. All the exhibitors adjacent to Orbis found it "unbearable" to "listen to the same 1.5-hour programme on domestic folk traditions for seven days from 8:30 am to

6:30 pm non-stop". At the same time, the reporters claimed – with a great deal of satisfaction – that due to "continual education towards political attitudes in the socialist states", the East European publishers expressed a strong interest in Orbis's production, including titles such as *Western Europe – the Nuclear Hostage of the USA*. Again, as late as March of 1989, they concluded that through its production Orbis "helped to propagate the advantages of the socialist system".

There is also a report on Orbis's presentation at the 41st International Book Fair in Frankfurt on 9–18 October 1989, indorsed as late as 15 December 1989. Beyond basic data about the number of exhibitors, the books presented, visitors, and so on, the report includes a note about the opening, "highly political" speech by Dr. Helmut Kohl, who announced the decision of the German Booksellers Association to reward the Peace Prize to Václav Havel. Without any more clichés on the "aggressive nature of capitalism", at least this reporter suggested in a rather plain, business-like tone: "the success of a book depends on the graphic design, colourfulness, the number of photographs, the quality of the print and the paper ...; in the current tough competitive context of the world book market, every idea on how to attract a reader is important". There is also a detailed account of a meeting with West German distributors, which was one of Orbis's key priorities. Nonetheless, as the reporter noted, two of the titles in French that the distributor expressed an interest in "were currently not available". The reporter concluded with a number of "recommendations", which in a sense reveal some of the weakest aspects of the system at that time. These included a call for efficient promotion using interesting and colourful catalogues and for publishing "attractive titles with hidden discreet propaganda" that would be able to compete on the international market with "high quality print". The reporter also suggested making use of exhibitions organised by foreign publishers in Czechoslovakia and following the international book market and book pricing trends. Given the growing specialisation of publishing in the world, Orbis needed to begin focusing its international presentations more effectively on specific, clearly defined areas of publishing, both in terms of regions and genres.

At this time, in the years of 1988–1989, it would probably have been difficult for most of Orbis's employees to imagine the scale of the change that was to come. One of Orbis's employees visited the "Days of the Czechoslovak Economy", a fair held in Minsk, Belarus, on 15–22 November 1989, essentially during the Velvet Revolution, and she

completed her report on that trip on 8 December 1989. Despite what had happened in Czechoslovakia in the meantime, she described in a detailed and indeed a rather enthusiastic fashion all the “lectures, briefings, fashion shows and wine tastings” she had attended and suggested that the only way to improve the level of knowledge about Czechoslovakia within the Soviet region would be through direct contacts with particular media institutions in the individual republics. She noted that in order to further develop cooperation with Belarusian partners, a crucial element would be the future character of *Orbis* and its capacity to provide all the materials free of charge. She went on to list contacts for various institutions, including the leading paper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, while noting, rather apologetically, that she failed to meet up with paper’s editor-in-chief owing to other commitments in her itinerary. Her report includes a few lines inserted by *Orbis*’s editor-in-chief: “The aim of the journey was fulfilled. Given the current situation, it is not advisable to continue to provide free services, even if the impact of doing so would unquestionably be positive”. In other words, the months that followed the events of November 1989 – months that witnessed the registration of a hundred new and independent private publishers a week – were, at least from the perspective of the state companies, a period of expectation rather than one of radical change. And the documents produced by the company’s officials shortly after the ‘Revolution’, do not seem to indicate much of an attempt to actively contribute to, or indeed, promote change.

What documents from the late 1980s demonstrate especially is the great deal of stubborn rhetoric that survived, which in many cases reveals barely a hint of the profound change that the centrally controlled system, as instituted during the Cold War, would undergo within just a few months. Not unlike Darnton’s printed resources in France dating back two hundred years earlier, anyone looking for any explicit “signs of the oncoming Revolution” in the state publishers’ archives are bound to be disappointed.⁹² What they reveal instead is the increasing incapability of the command-system of production and distribution system to reproduce its own operations in virtually all of its aspects, including technology (the quality of print and video presentations, the insufficient supply of printed matter, the ‘dull’ appearance of the books),

⁹² Robert Darnton, “Do Books Cause Revolutions?” in R. Darnton (1996), 240.

management (the lack of economic subjectivity, the inability to compete on the international market and almost total absence of knowledge about international trends owing to the isolation of domestic production), including the outdated content of the publications reproducing the polarisation of the Cold War discourse and East-West controversies. All these issues were rather gently identified by the more courageous editors.

The discursive shifts recorded in the respective publishers' archives were just one part of the processes that characterised this era. Signs of how the entire command system of book production, sales, and reception was deteriorating began to emerge even in the local media in the second half of the 1980s. Again, no signs of a direct attack on the key principles of central control of the institutional infrastructure (or of the content of its production for that matter) could have been traced in the media coverage, but modest and very subtle references to the material quality of books gradually surfaced. Seemingly marginal comments on missing pages, unreadable print, bindings that fell apart – these complaints made their way into some local periodicals long before it became acceptable to publicly question more substantial (ideological) issues like the current barriers between official (censored) and alternative (independent) production. Among the media's – or its more courageous journalists' – favourite targets at this time was what may have really been the biggest weakness in the centrally controlled system – book *distribution*.⁹³ Volumes produced by printing companies all over the country were shipped to a few central warehouses, most of them located in a former military estate in a village called Nová Ves u Mělníka. About fifty titles a week were distributed centrally from there to approximately two thousand shops nationwide. The system of central distribution was further complicated by the fact that the warehouse was equipped with "primitive technology", a point that even the head of the company Kniha daringly made in an interview published in the strongly pro-communist periodical *Tvorba* in 1988.⁹⁴ Also, in this case, time continued to be an issue – in order to keep up with the regular 'book Thursdays' scheme, the process of distributing a title from the

⁹³ One of the few journalists who continually covered the collapsing command-system of book production and distribution was Josef Chuchma. See, for example, Josef Chuchma, "Knihkupcův souboj s dobou," [The Bookseller's Struggle with the Current Times], *Kmen* 18/13 (1988): 5.

⁹⁴ "Kniha je kniha" [A Book Is a Book], interview with Z. Janda, the director of the national company Kniha, *Tvorba* 19/48 (1988): 4–5.

central warehouses to the individual bookstores had to begin at least four weeks prior to a book actually going on sale.

One of the key features of the command system of book production, the warehouses overloaded with growing stocks of unsold books, became increasingly pressing. Some books, such as classic Czech novels included on school reading lists, were to be kept available in order to regularly supply the market and were to be stored for up to five months. But most of the books in storage were not there for this reason. One of the problems was that, as planning procedures gradually began to fail, most printers tried to release up to 40% of their total annual production in the fourth quarter of the year, half of it in December for the Christmas market. The growing stock was further added to by the overestimated and 'over-planned' print runs of numerous titles that the market could no longer absorb. In fact, by 1988 the situation had become so alarming that the head of Kniha proposed transforming this state distribution enterprise into a shareholders' company made up of individual (indeed at that point still state-owned) publishers. Their 'investments' would help to update the equipment and technology and as members of the company the publishers would be more actively involved in the process of promoting books, which he described as being "somewhat stifled compared to the West".⁹⁵ The accumulation of unsold books accompanied by the accumulation of operational institutional troubles, such as delays in distribution, obsolete technology, and the relatively long distances between the central warehouses and the actual selling points, only intensified the gap between the growing stock of 'unwanted' books on the one hand and the rising demand for 'wanted' titles on the other.

In this sense, the book business resembled other national industries. Books were – in a way a marginal but typical – part of the entire 'normalised' economic and social situation.⁹⁶ It must be stressed again that Czechoslovakia in the 1980s was one of the most rigidly politically and ideologically consolidated regimes in the entire region (comparable perhaps to GDR and to some extent also Romania), and heavily dependent economically and politically on the Soviet Union. At the same time, the country came under heavy economic pressure, partly as

⁹⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁶ See Milan Otáhal, *Normalizace 1969–1989. Příspěvek ke stavu bádání*. [Normalisation 1969–1989. The State of Research], (Prague: Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AVČR, 2002).

a result of a delayed echoing of the oil crisis of the late 1970s, but primarily owing to the rigid opposition of the political elites to adopting any major economic reforms or investing in new technologies. There was a significant slowdown in the growth of GDP as a result of the country's continuing focus on heavy industry, the expansionist growth of the economy, the rising prices of imported raw resources, and the use of obsolete technologies in all spheres of production, owing to the country's isolation from contemporary world developments and the weak links between scientific research and industry.

The Husák government's main project of satisfying the basic consumption needs of the population, a project designed to limit opportunities for further social conflicts after 1968, also began to fall apart, as most areas of national production – including book-related production – suffered from an ineffective style of management, corruption, and the increasing impact of the 'shadow economy'. As with the book warehouse, the result of this was growing stocks of unsaleable goods of dubious quality. Moreover, it meant that the government had lost the capacity to regulate consumers' behaviour. It was not just that *some* washing machines, trousers, or books were not available on the market, but that people were no longer willing to spend money on the poor quality ones that were there. Instead they preferred to queue up in front of shops and try to bribe salespeople in order to obtain what they considered a 'good quality' pair of trousers or a 'good quality' book, and at that time consumer demand far exceeded supply.

However, in the specific case of books, the system that was originally set up to be resistant to the vagaries of the commercially driven book market gradually became trapped within itself. What was the solution? Keep producing reprints of titles in demand? Expand the variety of titles on offer? Or turn to using 'non-traditional' formats like paperbacks – just as, for example, Reclan Universal Bibliothek was doing in the GDR? There were big obstacles to most potential solutions. Even fifty years after the so-called 'paperback revolution' hit the Western book world, local book buyers were still reluctant to buy paperback books. In fact, this consumer habit persisted for years after 1989, and this 'conservative' view was supported by the costs of production and book prices, which were almost identical for both paperback and hardcover. The issue of reprints was equally complicated in a system of planned and thus fixed paper allocation and inflexible printing capacity. There was only one planned and approved 'paper pie' that all the publishers needed to get a piece of. They all had to share this one

source, and if one of them was in a position to get extra paper in order to reprint one title, this meant that the others had less paper. Unless an editor-in-chief had enough negotiating clout to get a larger wedge of the paper pie from the central authorities, either other titles of the house's editorial plan had to be released with a limited print run or simply had to be excluded from the publication list altogether. Thus, even though some publishers made an effort to increase the print runs of titles in high demand, and in doing so even had the support of the authorities, represented by the Ministry of Culture, this 'market-driven' behaviour only had a destabilising effect on the entire centralised system.

Even Pilař himself, who would never have been suspected of directly subverting the establishment, summed up the desperate state of affairs in an essay published in *Tvorba* in late 1988, tellingly entitled 'A Book is Primarily a Cultural Value'. He noted that "the massive print runs that we agreed to produce this year in accordance with the requirements of the Ministry completely destabilised our production and created unbelievable chaos in the process of the fulfilment of our editorial plan. While the printers may welcome print runs of hundreds of thousands of titles by popular authors, and the bookseller and the reader are satisfied, today's planning mechanism simply does not take anything like that into account".⁹⁷ Pilař thus rather unintentionally pointed out one of the key issues of the centrally controlled system. In the theory and practice of centralised book production and reception, and even more so in the latest stages of its development in the 1980s, the element of 'satisfaction', let alone happiness, was missing. The absence of these categories, along with the continual ritualisation of virtually any sphere of professional life, grounded in the largely unwritten system of constraints and barriers (i.e. a phenomenon also convincingly analysed by the sociologist Ivo Možný), was certainly among the factors that significantly contributed to the system's eventual collapse.⁹⁸ Both Havel's greengrocer, with the pro-communist slogans stuck in the boxes of carrots in his shop window, and the wealthy South Moravian winemaker in Možný's work who, despite the enormous earnings he

⁹⁷ Jan Pilař, "Kniha je především hodnota kulturní," [A Book Is Primarily a Cultural Value] in *Tvorba* 19/40 (1988): 12.

⁹⁸ Ivo Možný, *Proč tak snadno... Některé rodinné důvody sametové revoluce* [Why So Easily... Some Family Reasons for the Velvet Revolution]. 1st edition, (Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství, 1991), 41.

has made on the black wine market, still has to constantly bribe local and party authorities in order to protect his essentially illegal business, were part of growing number of citizens at every level of society who were becoming increasingly intolerant of the system. The entire system had become self-enclosed, and every further intervention directed at partial change within fixed limits just generated more confusion and destabilisation.

PART III

... AND WHAT COMES AFTER ...

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCONTINUOUS CONTINUITIES

It is a frequent practice among analysts of the 'post-communist' cultural and media transition to use references to the wider socio-economic context to introduce their discussion of the subject.¹ For example, the introductory paragraph to one account of the 1990s media scene, based on Hungarian, Slovak, and Czech examples, informs readers that after the fall of the Berlin Wall most of the states in the region experienced free elections, nonetheless, "many of the other indicators of material well-being, such as average living standards and life expectancy, dropped alarmingly". This definition of the 'post-communist' world is further supported by specific evidence: "for some it has been a decade of opportunities: of BMWs, mobile phones, and villas in select Mediterranean resorts. For others it means unemployment, poverty, and increasing desperation".² We then read that, despite some clearly democratic tendencies, the social processes of the 1990s were exclusively "negotiated by elite groups, organised in favour of elite groups and limited by the interests of these groups".³ In other words, since the collapse of the communist governments, which was orchestrated by a narrow group of individuals, the 'people' of the 'region' have been exposed to a dramatic decline in the quality of life and a sharp increase in class differences. One of the questions a reader of these lines might be left with is the following: since the people of the region are now faced with such misery, was it worth tearing down the Berlin Wall in the first place? And to take matters even further, was the world not on the whole better off and 'safer' behind the Wall?

¹ The use of the terms 'post-communist' and 'post-socialist' should be approached along similar lines as the use of the terms 'communism' versus 'socialism', discussed, for example, in the above-quoted work by Katherine Verdery. See K. Verdery (2004), 189–198, 196*n*1.

² Colin Sparks, "Media Theory after the Fall of European Communism: Why the Old Models from East and West Won't Do Any More," in James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, eds., *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2003), 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 39.

Challenging this particular picture of the 'transition' and even the very idea of examining the cultural and intellectual 'superstructure' on a socio-economic 'basis' would go beyond the purpose of this study. In addition, alternative scenarios to this specific approach have already been provided elsewhere by numerous political scientists, sociologists, and, recently, historians, both domestic and international ones, as the so-called post-communist or, more precisely, post-socialist 'transition' was a key research theme for social scientists inside as well as outside the Eastern bloc in the 1990s. Even though just a brief summary of the outcomes of these studies would only lead to the further simplification of matters, some of them shall be at least referred to here, for the above-cited list of features to a large extent continues to shape the debate about the period of the 1990s. It shall also be noted that while the contextual introductions to discussions of 'post-communist culture' completed by scholars situated outside the region tend to relate more to the given author's own political position than to the object of study, even domestic accounts are not entirely free of bias, as many of the local researchers are not just 'objective' analysts of the transition but were also its active 'agents'. Some of them took up public and political positions and their own production of knowledge on the transition continued to co-shape, at least to some extent, the very changes they were analysing. Nonetheless, even within local intellectual communities of limited size, such as that in the current Czech Republic, various, often competing, positions and views on the nature of the 'transition' have emerged. As a result, it is very difficult to identify any univocal, consensual picture of the 'winners' and the 'losers' in the available body of analytical texts dealing with this topic.

Similarly, there is a variety of views about the very definition of the post-1989 processes. Milan Tuček, a prominent Czech sociologist, noted that "[i]t is generally agreed that what we usually call post-socialist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, started in 1989. It is also assumed that this process of 'systematic change' has so far not been completed".⁴ Pavel Machonin, who studied the development of Czech society since the 1960s, talks about the 'post-socialist' changes as "a relatively new type of societal process: a qualitative metamorphosis of a totalitarian political system in a pluralist parliamentary

⁴ Milan Tuček et al., *Dynamika české společnosti a osudy lidí na přelomu tisíciletí* [The Dynamics of Czech Society and the Fortunes of People at the Turn of the Millennium], (Prague: Slon, 2003), 25.

democracy realised through democratic and peaceful means to the benefit of the people and with their support”⁵ Jacques Rupnik, in his introduction to a major study of the first post-1989 decade by the sociologists Petr Matějů and Jiří Večerník, identified the three main questions of the period: how to build capitalism without capital; how to rebuild the middle class; and to what extent the post-revolutionary success of the liberal rightwing political party ODS (Občanská demokratická strana – Civic Democratic Party) was related to its actual socio-democratic political practices?⁶ Most domestic analysts would perhaps agree with Tuček’s remark that, despite some considerable differences, “what all the countries of the region shared was the establishment of a democratic pluralistic parliamentary system in most post-socialist countries, de-nationalisation, de-etatisation, de-collectivisation, the privatisation and liberalisation of the economy and opening it up to international markets, the introduction of new sources of capital, changing political orientations, and *changes to the spiritual and moral face of cultural and social institutions, the liberalisation of cultural life*”. He also suggested that even though “[i]nstitutional changes followed *preceding* changes in social consciousness, which culminated in the spiritual crisis of the state-socialist system”, they “represented – in terms of both timing and causality – the primary objective processes of the social transformation, as political-institutional changes were always a step ahead of economic-institutional ones”. Tuček further proposed a kind of phasing of the transitional processes, suggesting that “(t)he changes in political institutions were soon followed by significant changes in the institutional organisation of economics and also *cultural institutions* which were by no means any less important”.⁷

It is not difficult to notice, however, that most analytical texts dealing with the ‘transition’ either contain no deeper analysis of the changes in cultural institutions at all, or the analysis has been relegated to the

⁵ Pavel Machonin, *Česká společnost a sociologické poznání. Problémy společenské transformace a modernizace od poloviny šedesátých let 20. století do současnosti* [Czech Society and Sociological Knowledge. Issues of Social Transformation and Modernisation since the Mid-1960s to Date], (Prague: ISV nakladatelství, 2005), 267.

⁶ Jiří Večerník and Petr Matějů eds., *Zpráva o vyvoji české společnosti 1989–1998* [Report on the Development of Czech Society 1989–1998], (Prague: Academia, 1998), 12.

⁷ All quotations in this paragraph come from M. Tuček (2003), 25. Italics are mine.

margins of the social scientist's interest. In other words, just as the accounts of the Communist regime were characterised by the methodological and discursive prevalence of socio-economic analyses, a similar tendency can also be identified in the accounts of the transition that followed that regime. Despite this tendency, it is also worth noting that one of the central points of interest in local accounts of the post-1989 socio-political processes has been the question of how the past and the present overlap, that is, the question of the continuity and discontinuity of the changes. For example, Tuček notes that institutional changes were a driving force behind the transition and as such they differ from "wider and deeper socio-economic and cultural-civilisational processes". They differ in the sense that they acquire the character of a "*discontinuous change*, of a true transfer from one form of relations to another".⁸ According to him, many economists and political scientists considered this 'transition to democracy and the market', as they often labelled it, to be a synonym for the entire post-socialist development. However, for Tuček and for other local researchers, it is just the "initial institutional phase" of the transition, and a phase that always remains defined in relation to a particular historical time. The tendency to mistake this initial institutional change for the entire transitional process could be responsible for much of the "revolutionary" discontinuous discourses produced, particularly in international academic and popular texts that emerged immediately after 1989. Much of the local analytical interest in continuity, however, has focused on the legacy of the 'old regime' and its consequent impact on post-1989 social processes. Some authors have talked about a 'value dilemma' in the post-communist countries, which derives from the conflict between the 'legacy of communism' on the one hand and the people's initial ideas about the new 'post-revolutionary' society on the other. The co-existence of these, often contradictory, value principles supposedly led to a slightly schizophrenic social mentality in the post-communist countries, stemming from an unclear vision of the future development of the entire transition process.⁹ In simple terms, this dilemma could also be understood as a basic conflict between the 'revolution' and the 'people', which to a large extent co-shaped the

⁸ M. Tuček, (2003), 25–26.

⁹ Jiří Černý, "Změny v hodnotovém systému populace," [Changes in the Value System of the Population], *Odras společenských změn ve veřejném mínění 1990–1998* [A Reflection of Social Changes in Public Opinion], M. Tuček et al., eds., WP 99:1, (Prague: Sociologický ústav, 1999), 71–99.

immediate post-revolutionary period. On the one hand, the transformation of political and economic institutions clearly demonstrated a number of discontinuous features that were largely framed in the terms of a 'sudden' and 'unexpected' collapse. But on the other hand, the 'common' people's perceptions and expectations of discontinuous changes had a more gradual and continuous character.

Overall, however, at least in the Czech context of the 1990s, there was little empirical evidence to fully support the assumptions about the 'alarming drop' in the indicators of material well-being and the increasing desperation reported in the citation above. From a strictly economic perspective, the 1990s are often divided into four periods, periods that are also significant for the analyses of post-1989 book production and reception. These included the overall decline in the early 1990s; a relatively successful (and socially differentiated) attempt at balancing the decline in the mid-1990s (until 1996); an economic depression in the second half of the 1990s; and the overall regeneration, which had begun by 1999. An economic decline did indeed occur at the start of the 1990s, manifested in lower productivity in all the major industries, while the increase in wages did not match the increase in the price of basic goods and the rise of inflation. As a result, in opinion polls conducted in early 1991, 74% of respondents referred to a general decline in the standard of living.¹⁰ As Tuček – one of the more sceptical analysts – noted, "in many ways actual economic development contrasted with the satisfaction of inhabitants, with the democratisation changes, and with hopes distributed via the intense neo-liberal propaganda of the rightwing parties and media".¹¹ However, the Czech economy did maintain, for example, a very low level of unemployment (below 4%) until at least 1996.

Another issue has been raised repeatedly in accounts of the post-communist changes in the 1990s: the issue of class differentiation. As shall be discussed below in relation to book prices, both the income and the individual property of the majority of the population were relatively equal in the era of 'really existing socialism', and there were no dramatic shifts or changes in the nearly four decades after the Communist Party took power in the late 1940s.¹² Income earned in the

¹⁰ M. Tuček (2003), 112.

¹¹ M. Tuček (2003), 113.

¹² See, for example, Jiří Večerník, "Problémy příjmu a životní úrovně v sociální diferenciaci," [Problems of Income and Living Standards and Social Differentiation],

shadow economy (services and trade) and the different positions individuals occupied in the *nomenklatura* were certainly sources of social differentiation, but it has been very difficult – if not impossible – to record this in statistics.¹³ The generally comparable level of income across the population helped guarantee relatively stable social standards for the majority of the less qualified and, indeed, less ambitious groups of the population (the industrial and agricultural working classes), and ‘equal’ incomes also secured the continuity of the regime as such in both economic and ideological terms. The limited influence of productivity and qualifications on individual income simultaneously provided little motivation, initiative, or moral impetus for employees to be productive and consequently reinforced the overall economic gap between Czechoslovakia and the more developed market economies. However, this socio-economic context, as noted above, also created relatively egalitarian conditions for cultural reception, including access to books.

The processes of the 1990s inevitably resulted in considerable differentiation of income and property and a consequent re-definition of the very process of social differentiation – between elite and non-elite members of society. For example, socialist Czechoslovakia – one of the economically most rigid countries in the region – had just 4500 officially registered private businesses in 1988. But from the end of 1989 the number of private businesses had grown dramatically and by 1995 it had reached approximately 400 000.¹⁴ The growth of the private

in *Československá společnost. Sociologická analýza sociální stratifikace* [Czechoslovak Society. Sociological Analysis of Social Stratification], ed. Pavel Machonin (Bratislava: Epoque, 1969); Jiří Večerník, “Distribuční systém v Československu: Empirická fakta, výkladové hypotézy,” [The Distribution System in Czechoslovakia: Empirical Data, Explanatory Hypothesis], *Sociologický časopis* 27 (1991): 39–56.

¹³ Although average figures only offer an illustration, in 1978, for example, the average income of a highly educated male professional in the Czech Republic was 3156 Czech Crowns while the income of a qualified worker was 2,401 Czech Crowns. By 1984 the difference was even smaller: 3811 compared to 3123 See M. Tuček (1996), 35. It is noteworthy that according to these data the incomes were generally lower by a couple of hundred Czech Crowns in the Slovak part of the country and women’s incomes were approximately two-thirds of men’s in a situation where over 90% of all economically active women were employed full time.

¹⁴ A limited form of independent entrepreneurship began to be permitted in 1985, mostly in the area of small-scale service professions, such as plumbers, electricians, or renting out a room or two in one’s house. However, it was estimated that at least one-third of all communal services were provided within the sphere of the ‘shadow economy’, that is, during working hours officially paid by a (state) employer using tools and materials unofficially ‘taken away’ from the (state) employer institution. All data on the development of private businesses quoted in reference to M. Tuček (1996), 15–17.

sector after 1989 was accompanied by a deterioration of the material standing of previously privileged categories of workers, particularly those working in agriculture and heavy industry.¹⁵ An analysis of social status over the course of the crucial fifteen-year period around the time of the revolution (1984, 1993, 1999) also revealed a gradual change in the status profile of Czech society. The 'pear-shaped' social structure that typified the 1980s, with a wide stratum at the base, underwent a gradual transformation towards the oval, 'apple' shape that is common in other European societies with a longer history of a market economy.¹⁶

The frequent assumption of a sudden and sharp polarisation within the formerly 'egalitarian' socialist society, a polarisation essentially based on early capitalist principles of strictly hierarchical social stratification – the BMW-versus-penury opposition – has simply not been confirmed by local social analysts, at least not in the Czech case. What they do talk about, however, is a high level of 'status inconsistency', something that was already identified in surveys of 'socialist' Czechoslovak society in the late 1960s.¹⁷ Such phenomena stem from a discrepancy between the general cultural and educational characteristics of particular social groups, on the one hand, and their class definition based on property, material position, power, etc., on the other. The issue of social polarisation in post-socialist society involves other issues specifically connected with the transition, ones which have been highly visible in the public sphere and have been of both scholarly interest and political relevance: restitution, poverty, and the role of 'old' and 'new' elites.¹⁸ In terms of size and scale, the post-1989 transfer of

¹⁵ Thus, for example, according to the above quoted resources, in 1992, an educated professional made 6789 a month, a worker made 4225, and a person owning a business with employees had a monthly income of 8490. See M. Tuček (1996), 35.

¹⁶ Czech sociology has traditionally worked with a stratification scheme based on a five-dimensional model of individual status, which includes highest level of achieved education, the complexity of a job, the position in the decision-making hierarchy, individual income, and lifestyle (cultural activities outside working hours). An average position in these five scales defines the 'status level' of an individual or a group. The inter-relationship between particular dimensions then defines the degree of 'status consistency' or 'inconsistency'. One of the major disadvantages of this model is that if a respondent fails to answer one of the questions, such as income, he or she is automatically excluded from the surveys and consequently the size of the sample is reduced. The status surveys also exclusively include only the economically active population and do not include the unemployed. See M. Tuček (2003), 211.

¹⁷ P. Machonin, ed., *Československá společnost...* (1969).

¹⁸ See, for example, J. Večerník, "Změny ve mzdové, příjmové a majetkové nerovnosti," [Changes in Income and Property Inequality], in Pavel Machonin and

property, which included both restitutions and the privatisation of state assets, including all printing, publishing, distribution, and book-selling companies, was much bigger than any of the previous property handovers experienced before by the local population – a relatively frequent occurrence in their history.¹⁹ Nevertheless, while the restitutions of the early 1990s, which affected individuals and families across all social strata, certainly contributed to further social differentiation, a certain degree of continuity from prosperity and individual wealth established earlier has also been observed.²⁰

Poverty, the bottom end of the pole of social differentiation, is almost taken for granted as a ‘natural’ consequence of the post-socialist transition. Generalisations about the ‘impoverishment of the post-communist region’ are always going to be problematic, as the indicators of such developments vary dramatically between individual post-socialist countries. Most importantly, comparisons of the ‘before’ and ‘after’ must take into account the fact that “under the communist regime, various circumstances meant that poverty remained mostly invisible”.²¹ As a result, it is difficult to provide current representative data on poverty in the transition context, as it is always bound to be a somewhat subjective phenomenon.²² From the perspective of cultural reception, the ‘impoverished’ post-communist population has often been framed as a group with a potentially limited capacity to communicate with ‘cultural products’ in the transition context of the privatisation of cultural industries. It is frequently assumed that the former,

Milan Tuček, eds., *Česká společnost v transformaci* [Czech Society in Transition], (Prague: Slon, 1996), 91–105.

¹⁹ The restitutions of the early 1990s – among the largest in scale within the bloc of post-socialist countries – included over 70 000 tenement buildings (mostly downtown buildings originally built for middle-class professionals rather than suburban blocks of flats), over 30 000 industrial or entrepreneurial buildings, and nearly half of the forested and agricultural land of the country. See M. Tuček et al., (2003), 162.

²⁰ As Tuček noted, it is generally agreed (though it is very difficult to prove empirically) that the people who managed to benefit from privatisation “were those who generated enough economic and social capital prior to 1989”. See M. Tuček et al., (2003), 167.

²¹ J. Večerník, “Who Is Poor in the Czech Republic?”, *Czech Sociological Review* 40/6 (2004): 808. This invisibility stemmed from a number of factors, including the ideological pressure on all (public as well as professional) representations of poverty, the general equalisation of living standards, which for the majority of the population were close to minimum, and a constitutionally imposed compulsory employment which prevented any unemployment and consequent benefit dependence.

²² In terms of the so-called Subjective Poverty Line, the Czech rate of nearly sixty percent is enormously high in comparison with other EU countries.

paternalistic communist regime provided 'cheap' and even 'high quality' books, theatre shows, films, and so forth, which after 1989 were no longer accessible to the 'common people', who then became victims of affordable 'Western commercial trash'. However, as a leading analyst of the issues of poverty, Jiří Večerník, has noted, "it is never possible to unambiguously establish the presence of poverty in a society ... there is a considerable mismatch between belonging to the category of the poor and really feeling poor".²³ It can thus also be assumed that the individual level of cultural 'consumption', including buying books, cannot simply be derived from the size of an individual's income, nor even from a person's purchasing power.²⁴

The role of the new elites in the transition societies, and especially the role of the continuing presence of pre-1989 elites and the transformation of their political and social capital into economic capital after 1989, was yet another topic often raised in the debates on transition, both nationally and internationally. Certainly, there is the obvious matter of the legacy of the Communist Party, which used to represent one of the few mechanisms of upward social and economic mobility available to people in pre-1989 Czechoslovakia, and as such it was a depository of local elites, including those active in cultural production.²⁵ However, the actual impact of former Communist Party

²³ J. Večerník (2004): 808.

²⁴ At least in the specific Czech social context, "more change occurred in the composition than in the amount of poverty". Thus the 'transition' itself brought about more the threat of poverty than an actual increase in measurable poverty. As Večerník points out, "a massive surge in social exclusion is not likely ... poverty remains mostly an economic characteristic rather than a social stratification category". In monetary terms – according to the legal and the EU measurement – poverty in the Czech Republic affects about 3–7% of households, that is, "one-half of the EU-15 average and close to the EU countries with the most generous social systems, such as Belgium the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries". When compared to other new EU countries (10% for Hungary, Poland 15%), the better standing is even greater. Monetary poverty in the Czech Republic "has changed its face rather than its rate". See J. Večerník (2004): 808, 830.

²⁵ After the events of 1968, approximately 600 000 Communist Party members were expelled because of their 'revisionist' inclinations. Many of the 'punished' members were top professionals in positions of high social rank in the spheres of culture, media, academia, etc. Nonetheless, by 1978, there were again over one million members. In less than a decade, the renewal of the Party was complete. Surveys in 1984 showed that twelve years after the social 'purges' of the late 1960s, seventeen percent of the adult population (20–69 years old) had Party membership. See Milan Tuček, *Zpráva o vývoji sociální struktury české a slovenské společnosti 1945–1993* [A Report on the Development of the Social Structure of Czech and Slovak Societies 1945–1993], WP 96:6, (Prague: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 1996), 27–30.

members on the transition processes is difficult to demonstrate empirically, as, according to surveys in 1993, up to one-third of the pre-1989 members refused to acknowledge their former Communist Party membership.²⁶ While Tuček and his team confirmed in their analyses the existence of a certain degree of ‘social recycling’ of former communist elites, they also somewhat cautiously noted that, “the relatively high percentage of former Communist Party members among current entrepreneurs shows that the hypothesis about the conversion of [earlier acquired] social and political capital into economic capital can be partly substantiated”.²⁷ In addition, despite the fact that there have been some major studies of elites made over the past fifteen years, not only does there seem to be insufficient evidence to support the idea of an elites-dominated conspiracy behind the post-1989 transition process, but also, as Machonin noted in 2004, we lack consistent and comprehensive data on Czech elites in the late 20th and early 21st centuries altogether.²⁸ What might also be worth noting is that the public posturing of the elite actors in the Velvet Revolution exhibited signs of a deliberate ‘anti-elitism’. This trend was to some extent headed by Havel himself, who, at least at the beginning of his post-1989 political career, employed a deliberately informal public image as a way of distancing himself from the over-formalised self-presentation of the previous

²⁶ This, the direct successor of the pre-1989 Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČM – Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia), which within post-communist Europe has exhibited exceptionally stubborn resistance to any reformist ideas, has enjoyed continuous growth in its election support, which accounted for 15% of the vote in 2004. Its election successes have stemmed from a solid and stable regional (party) infrastructure, solid material and economic foundations, and a relatively large membership base. In 2004, KSČM officially claimed it had 100,781 members. For more on the current position of the Czech Communist Party, see Daniel Kunštát, “Veřejná podpora KSČM po roce 1989: historická východiska, politické a sociální souvislosti, perspektivy,” [Public Support for the KSČM after 1989: Historical Bases, Political and Social Links, Perspectives], in *Naše společnost 2004* [Our Society 2004], (Prague: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2004), No. 1.

²⁷ M. Tuček (1996), 30.

²⁸ P. Machonin (2005), 252. On the issue of elites, see, for example, Pavel Machonin and Milan Tuček, *Česká společnost v transformaci* [Czech Society in Transition], (Prague: Slon, 1996); Pavel Machonin and Milan Tuček, *Zrod a vývoj nových elit v České republice (od konce osmdesátých let 20. století do jara 2002)* [Emergence and Development of New Elites in the Czech Republic (from the 1980s to the Spring of 2002)], *Sociologické texty*, 2002:1 (Prague: Sociologický ústav AV ČR); Pavel Machonin and Milan Tuček, “Czech Republic: New Elites and Social Change,” in *Elites after State Socialism. Theories and Analysis*, eds. J. Highley and G. Lengyel (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 25–47.

communist elites.²⁹ While it may seem a predictable conclusion to make, research in the relevant areas suggests that the rather complex issue of the role of the elites, class differentiation, and the actual outcomes of the post-1989 development are surrounded by more questions than confirmed assumptions and conclusions. At the same time, in all the aspects mentioned above, researchers refer to signs of *continuity* with the past rather than any indications of a dramatic *discontinuous* revolutionary transformation.

Assuming that we can accept this conclusion, the question remains as to what the place of cultural production and reception has been in this socio-economic context. The fact that there are as yet very few satisfactory answers to this question is another paradox of the post-1989 developments. Despite the attention given both nationally and internationally to the role of the 'playwright president' and his fellow artists, actors, and even fiction writers in the 'revolutionary' political affairs, the analysts of these events and their aftermath tend not to see specific cultural matters as their research priority. If addressed at all, such concerns tend to be part of more generally defined concepts of 'living standards', 'lifestyle', and 'leisure time', where the respective 'transition' processes were being examined. Tuček, for example, identified three leading trends in the transformation of the 'way of life' that occurred in Czech society in the course of the 1990s.³⁰ First, there was

²⁹ There was a strong emphasis – though often achieved rather unintentionally – on informality in public appearances, which contrasted dramatically with the dehumanised over-constructed presentation of the communist leaders. Images of Havel wearing a dark blue jumper to official meetings and in the trousers too short for him worn to his inauguration ceremony are well known. Also, unlike the nearly publically invisible spouses of the communist leaders, there is the fact that his wife Olga became a public figure, who elicited a very positive response from the 'common' people. Havel's very notion of a-political politics contained much of an anti-elitist approach. According to this notion, Civic Forum did not even define itself as a political party, but rather as a "movement, a 'primary school' for politics and politicians during the gestation of democracy". See Carol Sklanik-Leff, *The Czech and Slovak Republics. Nation versus State* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1998), 96–97 in a reference to Jan Urban, "Czechoslovakia: The Power and Politics of Humiliation," in *Spring in Winter: The 1989 Revolutions*, ed. Gwyn Prins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 124. Both books offer a solid and relatively detailed account of the 1989 events with a clear intra-regional comparative focus.

³⁰ Tuček defines 'lifestyle' as "a structured set of relatively stabilised everyday life practices, ways of doing things, and ways of behaving in various areas of human existence". (2003, 168) For his discussion of major trends in the local 'transitional lifestyle', see M. Tuček, (2003), 169–170.

a relative shift from uniformity to pluralism, accompanied by a diversification of choices, which led people to embrace freedom as such. A second trend is related to the consequent differentiation of living conditions and lifestyles, while the third is connected with the rise in the importance and power of economic and social (class) criteria.³¹

There is a general consensus that people's everyday lives in the 1990s were primarily determined by the amount of time people (across all social strata) spent at work, which significantly increased in the early 1990s, but had begun to decrease again by the late 1990s.³² Also, the structure of the workday changed, and the start and end of the workday became later than before. As a result the late afternoon hours (i.e. time outside work) seemed shorter to some, but the late evening hours seemed longer to others.³³ One of the most noticeable results of the early 1990s transition was the increase in the variety of leisure activities and cultural and entertainment events and even in the number of consumer options opened to people in general terms. It is probably no surprise that, like in other developed European societies, the majority of the Czech population began during the transition to show a tendency to prefer a "more passive and less demanding way of spending leisure time", and it is television that has tended to

³¹ What has also changed is the very definition of established categories of differentiation. For example, age and generation – always a key determining factor of social differentiation – acquired new characteristics related to the highly differentiated capacity of particular individuals or social groups, to adapt to the new (social, financial, technological, educational, etc.) conditions.

³² For example, the average working week was 53.4 hours in 1993 compared to 45 hours in 1999. According to a survey in 2002, employees in full-time jobs worked approximately 41 hours a week, while entrepreneurs claimed to work 50.4 hours. See M. Tuček, (2003), 177–179.

³³ Any definition of leisure time and the quantity and quality of that time must take into account important aspects relating to gender, age, and class. These will be addressed below in the discussion of the consequences of such changes for people's reading habits. There is, however, a growing group of professionals that barely existed prior to 1989 (such as the self-employed, entrepreneurs, employers), who have relative control over their working hours, can shift them according to individual interests, commitments and needs, and these may or may not include culture-related activities. Regardless of their professional position, the number of hours Czech women spend doing unpaid household-related work has traditionally been about two times as long (30hrs/week) as the amount spent by men (16hrs/week), and this has not changed much, regardless of any revolution. It is important to note, however, that according to the subjective estimation, approximately 30% of households have claimed that the time spent on this type of work decreased between 1989 and 1993, but the decrease remained socially structured. See M. Tuček (2003), 180.

rank high among the main leisure-time pursuits, alongside reading popular magazines.³⁴

Tuček and his colleagues found that differences in lifestyle exhibited a qualitative change in connection to socio-professional status during the 1980s and 1990s. This seems to support the idea of there being a strong relationship between an individual's or a family's preconditions for certain cultural standards and the measures of living standards, such as income level, savings, private property, etc. However, any definable link between income and cultural consumption/reception (for example, that people with higher income buy more books) has as yet received little research attention and is therefore difficult to prove. Despite the "growing socio-economic inequalities and to the different content and range of social stratification",³⁵ the local population was generally defined by a relatively high living standard – at least as indicated by the data on the growing consumption of durable goods (not just TV sets, but also washing machines and cars).³⁶ While inevitably differences between individual families were identified, particularly in terms of the quality and age of the things people owned, after more than a decade of transition sociologists have concluded that "so far no significantly more pronounced differentiation between poorer and richer households has occurred".³⁷ In addition, the increased

³⁴ M. Tuček (2003), 182. In the surveys 90% of respondents claimed to have watched television regularly, i.e. several times a day, or at least a number of times in a week. Only slightly more than one-quarter of the sample of respondents indicated they were 'reading books' as regularly as they watched television, and 2% said they watched television only a few times a year or not at all, while almost 40% admitted they read books that often. Nearly 85% of the sample claimed to be regular readers of popular magazines, compared to 30% who devoted the same time "to studying languages and reading professional literature". This survey of the frequency with which people engage in various leisure activities was conducted on a sample of 3092 members of the economically active Czech population in 1999. The comparable data are based on a project conducted in 1984 on the sample of 5,472 economically active individuals. See M. Tuček (2003), 182–186.

³⁵ M. Tuček (2003), 187. It is perhaps particularly noteworthy that, compared to the mid-1980s, in the 1990s the economic gap between university educated professionals and other socio-professional groups decreased, while the importance of the level of income (both per capita and per family) for the structure and content of leisure time had significantly increased.

³⁶ For example, there were 145 television sets per 100 households in the Czech Republic in 1998, compared to 'only' 125 in 1985, while there were 49 video recorders per 100 households in 1999 compared to 29 in 1995. Computer ownership increased fourfold between 1993 and 1999, and by the late 1990s one-quarter of the population claimed to own a PC. The ownership of video recorders doubled during the same period. See M. Tuček (2003), 118, 163.

³⁷ M. Tuček (2003), 257.

consumption of household furnishings and the factors supportive of purchasing durable goods “not only managed to limit but even to overcome the negative impact of the decrease of real incomes (and the devaluation of savings due to inflation).”³⁸

How do books fit into the picture of this (relative) post-revolutionary ‘consumer paradise’? While the growing number of TV sets and computers to be found in Czech households may not seem particularly supportive of reading habits, judging from the continually growing production of books and periodicals, since the early 1990s the ‘consumption’ of printed matter has also evidently been on the rise. Professionals who were involved in the local ‘transition-era’ book business generally agree that, despite inflation, the devaluation of people’s savings, and the multiplication of attractive new choices consumers have been confronted with, books have retained their special place in family budget planning.³⁹ Interestingly, although not all analysts regard books as a measure of living standards, the assumption about the *continuity* of trends in book reception could be tested with data on the book buying and reading habits of Czech families during the 1990s and early 2000s, and such data could include information on the size of personal libraries, the frequency of reading and its place in the range of other leisure activities, and the borrowing of books from public libraries during the ‘transition’ period.

While household furnishings did not prove to be a significant indicator of the social differentiation of Czech families during the 1990s, when it comes to the possession of personal libraries, the relationship to social stratification appears to be more complex. First of all, it must be noted that, although there are no available data on the content and genres of these books, the growing number of large domestic libraries (i.e. with over 100 volumes), evidence of which was recorded in surveys conducted throughout the 1970s and the 1990s, somewhat contradicts the image of an impoverished post-communist society trapped

³⁸ M. Tuček (2003), 119. According to estimates, there was a significant devaluation of savings, by one-third (34.4%), just between 1989 and 1991. See J. Tuček (2003), 162. At the same time, the respective surveys quoted in Tuček (2003) referred to 6.7% of Czech households owning a computer in 1993, whereas in 1999 it was already one-quarter of the households. See M. Tuček (2003), 191.

³⁹ Here I am referring to numerous informal discussions with publishers and book-sellers repeatedly conducted at Prague book fairs (‘Svět knihy’ – The World of Books) throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. See also Jaroslav Císař, “Základní fakta o produkci knih v ČR za rok 2001,” [Basic Facts about the Production of Books in the CR during 2001], www.sckn.cz (accessed 23 April 2005).

in a consumer media culture imported from the West.⁴⁰ At the same time, according to surveys that looked at the total property of two-income families in 1999, the possession of a personal library (along with family savings and computers) appeared to be a particularly significant indicator of differentiation. Nonetheless, no direct connection seems to exist between owning books on the one hand and the emerging socio-economic hierarchy on the other. Some analysts have even suggested that the size of a personal library could be considered yet more evidence of the status inconsistencies in Czech society, for it was not the families with the highest income level that tended to possess the largest personal libraries.⁴¹

Beyond the categories of household furnishings and consumption in general terms, another source of data on book reception is the category of 'cultural activities'. In fact, 'fiction reading' and 'attending theatres, concerts, and exhibitions' are actually two exceptional types of pursuits in the larger category of 'cultural activities'. Some comparative data on the frequency with which people engage in these activities have been collected in the past thirty years, and among other things they indicate that compared to the late 1970s and the mid-1980s regular attendance at the above-mentioned cultural institutions (once a week and once a month) had somewhat decreased by the early 1990s. But by the late 1990s the number of people claiming 'regular' attendance at theatres, concerts and exhibitions far exceeded the figures recorded in the late 1970s.⁴² A comparative survey of leisure activities between

⁴⁰ While according to a survey conducted in 1978, 52.7% of households claimed to have a personal library with more than one hundred books, in 1984 a slight decline was recorded (45.8%) but in 1993, 69.5% of households claimed to have a library with more than one hundred books, and 56.8% owned a library with more than two hundred volumes. See M. Tuček (1996), 31–32.

⁴¹ These data are based on a survey of the 'Overall estimate of property, ownership of summer cottages and gardens according to the socio-class type of two-income families in 1999'. Households were divided into ten types, ranging from entrepreneurial families to the families of unqualified workers. For example, 32% of families of entrepreneurs claimed the total value of their property to be worth more than 2 million Czech Crowns, but only 66% of these families claimed to own a library with more than 100 books. At the same time, just 6.7% of the families of so-called mid-level professionals reported property worth more than 2 million Czech Crowns, while 79.2% of those families had a larger library with more than one hundred books. See M. Tuček (2003), 256.

⁴² This trend was even confirmed with 'hard data', i.e. centrally collected statistical data on the number of theatre shows, tickets sold, money spent on tickets, etc. Attendance at cultural institutions has grown despite the dramatic increase in the price of theatre tickets, which grew sixfold, the price of concerts, which increased fourfold,

1978 and 1993, however, identified an immediate 'post-revolutionary' decline in the habit of reading fiction. This decline was observed especially among regular readers, that is, people who claimed to be 'reading books' at least once a week. The decline was even more significant among university-educated people: 70% in 1978 compared to 47.6% in 1993.⁴³ Nonetheless, as surveys conducted in the late 1990s have shown, at that time the number of people who claimed to read at least once a week and once a month had increased again, following a decrease in the immediate post-revolutionary period. The only exception to this trend was in the group of most active readers, those claiming to read daily, the number of which has been gradually decreasing.⁴⁴

One could speculate about the socio-cultural factors that have contributed to the decrease in the number of avid readers. One tempting explanation lies in the popular post-Cold War image of alternative intellectuals re-entering academia or other, professionally demanding 'real jobs' from which they had been expelled earlier, and consequently losing the free time they used to have for reading while working in 'pseudo-jobs' or as window cleaners or wardens. Nevertheless, if we consider the expanding spectrum of available leisure-time activities noted above, rising book prices and the deregulation of information on books in print, which turned any potential book buyer's attempts at tracing the desired titles on the de-centralised market into a major adventure, these figures can be viewed in a different light. Statistical data collected on the basis of library readers' records (which only cover a specific part of the reading population) show comparable developments: a temporal decrease in book loans and in the number of readers in 1990. But they also show its gradual return to the pre-1989 level. The growing number of library books being borrowed may be interpreted as evidence of a growing interest in reading, but it may also be a consequence of the above-noted changes on the book market, including the rise in book prices. Tables 1 and 2 show some of the trends mentioned above.

and gallery admission tickets, which rose eighteenfold in the course of the first transitional decade. See *Statistická ročenka* [Statistical Yearbook], 1992, 1994, 2001, and *Historická statistická ročenka ČSSR* [Historical Statistical Yearbook], 1984. Quoted in M. Tuček (2003), 188.

⁴³ The survey of 'Selected leisure activities in relation to education' included a sample of 10 789 respondents in the Czech Republic in 1978 and 4723 respondents in 1993. See M. Tuček (1996), 41. At the same time, for example, the frequency with which people engaged in sporting activities rose considerably.

⁴⁴ M. Tuček (2003), 187.

Tab. 1 The frequency of reading fiction (in %)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Not at all
1978	21.5	23.7	17.0	19.0	18.7
1984	15.6	29.7	8.9	21.1	24.7
1991	21.8	13.7	18.6	28.8	17.1
1993	14.8	11.6	17.4	43.1	13.2
1999	9.8	25.6	24.3	20.0	18.3

Source: Tuček et al., (2003), 187.

Tab. 2 Library users and borrowed books (in thousands)

	1977	1983	1989	1990	1992	1999
Readers registered	1558	1764	1708	1561	1182	1347
No. of borrowings	56 568	62 934	62 560	54 397	56 565	62 339

Source: *Statistická ročenka ČSFR, ČR 1992, 1994, 2001* (Statistical Yearbooks of Czechoslovak Federal/Czech Republic); *Historická statistická ročenka ČSSR*, Prague: SNTL; Bratislava: Alfa, 1985 (Historical Statistical Yearbook of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic). Data from 1977–1992 cover just the Czech part of the population of former Czechoslovakia.

Considering the lifestyle changes and the re-definition of the very concept of leisure time as such, it could be said that, although some considerable shifts in book reception can be identified, the first post-revolutionary decade did not bring as dramatic a change in book reading as one might have expected. Tuček and his team also examined reading patterns in relation to the socio-professional characteristics of particular social groups over an entire decade. The research results clearly showed that, contrary to the assumption of a rapid decline in 'cultural activities', higher and mid-level professionals did not significantly alter their reading habits during the transition decade at all, despite the inevitable increase in their work load. However, striking parallels have been identified between the reading habits of 'entrepreneurs with employees' and 'unqualified workers': nearly 25% of respondents in both these social categories claimed not to have read anything at all in 1999. In terms of the frequency of reading, the 8.8%

of daily readers among workers was a better score than just the 5.7% of passionate readers among entrepreneurs.⁴⁵

The sociologist Ivo Možný cites figures on cultural reception, including reading habits, and their general increase, despite the temporary post-1989 decline. He even considers this development to be one of the most significant characteristics of the entire process in the post-1989 transition.⁴⁶ Možný also refers to an international comparative survey of reading habits, in which Czechs – with more than 70% of respondents claiming to have read at least one book a month – occupied one of the top positions internationally, higher, for example, than Americans or the British.⁴⁷ It could be said that the emphasis on the country's 'cultural supremacy' in Možný's work seems yet more evidence of continuity in the way the 'achievements' of Czech society are framed in discourse. As already noted, a certain kind of cultural, intellectual, etc., superiority has been reproduced in references to national identity for decades if not centuries, and has often been applied in order to make up for the country's handicaps and shortcomings in other spheres, usually the economy and politics. Employing this kind of discourse has been part of an attempt to put the local community of readers into a position situated far above – or at least comparable to – the rest of the (developed) world, and this effort seems to be resistant to political and historical changes. This discursive mechanism is apparent not just in medialised celebrations of 'The Czechs – the Biggest Readers', but also in the statements of local book professionals and their organisations.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ M. Tuček (2003), 189.

⁴⁶ While 29% of respondents in a survey on leisure activities in 1991 stated that they read at least once a week, it was already 42% by 1997. See Ivo Možný, *Česká společnost. Nejdůležitější fakta o kvalitě našeho života* [Czech Society. The Most Important Facts about the Quality of Our Lives.], (Prague: Portal, 2002), 151, in reference to the 'IVVM 1997' [The Institute for Public Opinion Research].

⁴⁷ See I. Možný (2002), 152, in reference to the Adult Literacy Survey 1994–1998.

⁴⁸ In 2005, local leading dailies enthusiastically praised Czechs as the most committed readers in Europe in reference to the findings of the NOP World Culture Score, which surveyed 30,000 people in thirty countries between December 2004 and February 2005. With a reading frequency of 7.4 hours spent reading a week, they were contrasted with the Brits, who ranked lowest in Europe with just 5.2 hours spent reading. Czechs also ranked first among Europeans in the amount of time spent listening to radio: 13.5 hours per week. See "Češi drží v Evropě prvenství – jsou největšími čtenáři knih," (ctk+val) [Czechs Rank First in Europe – They Are the Biggest Readers of Books], *Mladá fronta Dnes* (4 July 2005): 7. Nonetheless, the website of the agency that is the source of these figures shows that even though Czechs do rank first among European countries the report highlights India's primacy at 10.7 hours per week, Thailand (9.4) and China (8), with not a single word about

The official website of the Czech Association of Booksellers and Publishers announced in its brief account of current Czech book production that “[d]espite some problems, the Czech book market has been developing positively towards normal European standards. One of the preconditions for such development is a relatively stable body of readers and their delight in building large home libraries. This trend is also evident in the average size of print runs, which are often much larger here than in countries with much bigger populations”.⁴⁹

Another question to be asked, however, is how the members of the local community and specifically readers themselves see their contribution to this ‘cultural supremacy’. It may be no surprise that the self-perception of the participants in the transition process, including those in the sphere of cultural production, seems dramatically to contradict the research results, which refer generally to positive trends, particularly in terms of the way leisure time is spent and in lifestyles. Respondents in surveys conducted in the late 1990s referred to a decline in all cultural, self-improvement, and other leisure activities, including ‘just doing nothing’. They also claimed that there was an increase in passively spent extra time (watching television) and a significant increase in time spent working. For example, in a survey conducted in 1999, 30.2% of respondents felt they now attended fewer concerts, exhibitions, and movies than in the past, compared to 5% who claimed the opposite. In this survey, 22.7% stated they were spending less time reading fiction while only 7.3% claimed an increase in reading time.⁵⁰

The personal perception of limited time for ‘cultural activities’ is found more or less in all social strata, even though individual analyses of specific cultural activities have shown that how much time people

the primacy of the Czechs in Europe. See http://www.nopworld.com/news.asp?go=news_item&key=179 (accessed 16 August 2005). However, in reaction to this survey, the BBC, for example, noted on its website that, according to the Indian National Readership Survey, more than one-third of rural Indians are illiterate, and so is about 15% of the urban population. See “Indians ‘World’s Biggest Readers,’” BBC News/South Asia, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4626857.stm (accessed 16 August 2005).

⁴⁹ See Jaroslav Císař, “Základní fakta o produkci knih v ČR za rok 2001,” [Basic Facts about the Production of Books in the CR during 2001], Svaz českých knihkupců a nakladatelů, www.sckn.cz (accessed 23 April 2005).

⁵⁰ According to a survey conducted in 1999, 30.2% of respondents felt they now attended fewer concerts, exhibitions and movies compared to 5% who claimed the opposite, and 22.7% thought they were spending less time reading fiction while only 7.3% claimed an increase in their reading time. See M. Tuček (2003), 194.

devote to particular activities, such as reading or theatre attendance, varies considerably according to socio-professional characteristics. Researchers looking at such issues noted, that “a contradiction between these two types of findings ... draws our attention perhaps to the different perception of the overall situation in society. During the 1980s period [perceived as ‘quiet’], people used to seek satisfaction in their [private] leisure activities since such satisfaction and fulfilment was not available in the [public] paid jobs”.⁵¹ Consequently, people may then have had the feeling that their time was dominated by leisure activities, and their paid employment was less on their minds. But amidst a new lifestyle rhythm and under altered circumstances the number of activities people were required to manage multiplied in the 1990s, and work has come to occupy a much more important or perhaps even dominant position in the way they view life than it used to have. There are perhaps very few exceptions where no such deterioration can be detected, such as the typical Czech practice of regular weekend trips to the family’s country cottage, a social phenomena that would warrant a chapter in its own right.⁵² However, since the early 1990s, activities such as reading fiction or visiting galleries seem to have moved – at least subjectively – into the margins of the list of personal priorities.

⁵¹ M. Tuček (2003), 190.

⁵² Some analysts have even described the Czech country cottage as “the symbol of regime bargain and of the public’s ‘inner immigration’”, and the former Czechoslovakia ranked second in the world in per capita ownership of country cottages. Others have labelled cottage ownership “a dinosaur whose continued survival and occasional renaissances keep on surprising everyone”. See C. Skálik-Leff (1998), 53; M. Tuček (2003), 196. Tuček noted that the cottage boom began in the 1960s. At that time it was made possible by an increase in the amount of leisure time (the introduction of Saturday as a day off work), combined with the relative availability of real estate and the advancement of automobile transportation. However, the origin of this behaviour can be traced back much farther, to the 1920s, when it was linked with the emergence of the ‘tramping’ movement (a form of anti-urban escapism with its own specific culture; mostly younger people leaving the city and spending their free time in the countryside; it was influenced by scouting and an interest in the American West) and the spreading trend among the upper middle classes to own summerhouses outside the city. A total of 12% of Czech households claimed to have owned or regularly used a cottage in 1991 and some surveys concluded that the number had increased even further by the early 2000s. By 2002, the statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs referred to nearly 400 000 recreational real estates, i.e. 39 summerhouses per 1000 inhabitants. It has always been common among the Czechs, even among those who otherwise resisted the cottage-owning mania, to spend weekends visiting the cottages of family and friends. According to surveys examining the amount of time people spend at cottages, 11.2% of respondents claimed to have visited a cottage at least once a month in 1991 compared to 10.3% in 1999. See M. Tuček (2003), 197.

In more general terms, however, numerous indicators, such as the considerable rise in life expectancy during the 1990s, a phenomenon associated with the increasing investment in public health and especially positive environmental changes, as well as the drop in abortion and suicide rates, must be taken into consideration before making conclusions about the 'losers' and 'winners' of the post-communist transition.⁵³ One cannot but support the view of local social scientists that just as socialist society "could not be defined in terms of one single [meritocratic] scheme of social stratification of class divisions, be it neo-Marxist or neo-Weberian, let alone primitive ideological schemes of non-antagonistic classes or social homogeneity, ... there is no simple explanatory scheme for understanding transitional post-socialist societies either".⁵⁴ As Tuček has noted, "the picture of the [Czech] social structure ... is anything but a simple class scheme, which would include status-consistent classes beautifully lined up, starting from the lowest and proceeding to the highest without any overlapping".⁵⁵ In the conditions of 'half-modernity and half-richness', post-socialist society does not have the distinctive features of either class capitalism or meritocratic stratification, and nor is it egalitarian or totalitarian any longer.⁵⁶ The sociologist Ivo Možný, even put 'cultural' and other lifestyle and environmental issues at the very centre of his enquiry, arguing that, "Czech society has made an enormous step forward [and] only a personal bitterness can prevent us from seeing the difference".⁵⁷

This brief look at some of the main (often competing) approaches applied by the local academic community to studying the social and economic context of the transition and the attempt to define the place reserved for cultural and, at least in some cases, also book-related matters in these debates makes no claims of exhausting all the issues and

⁵³ The investment into health care per inhabitant rose by 22% in 1995 compared to 1991, and 42.5% in 1999. Life expectancy grew from 68.1 to 71.7 years in the case of men and from 75.4 to 78.4 in the case of women during the period between 1989 and 2000. The amount of solid emissions of pollutants in the air in 1999 represented 9.2% of the 1990 level. See I. Možný (2002), 55–59, 110–114, and M. Tuček (2003), 125–126. The number of abortions per 1000 women in the 15–49 age group dropped from 32.3 in 1993 to 16.3 in 2004, and the 1995–1999 period had the historically lowest suicide rate since the Second World War. See "Population Fertility, Abortion and Pregnancies: By Age of Females," and "Sebevražednost podle věkových skupin," [Suicide Rates by Age Group], Český statistický úřad, <http://www.czso.cz> (accessed 19 March 2006).

⁵⁴ P. Machonin (2005), 182.

⁵⁵ M. Tuček (2003), 236–237.

⁵⁶ P. Machonin (2005), 182.

⁵⁷ I. Možný (2002), 200.

questions involved. It is possible to conclude that, with all their shortcomings, local empirical and theoretical reflections on the transition have tried to offer an alternative picture to the Western approach to the 1990s, an approach generally characterised by “its exclusive focus on the market and private property rights as a *telos* for transition, its designation of historical legacies as purely negative, ... and of societal and cultural factors as being secondary in importance”.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, even local social scientists have admitted that their own discipline “with all its quantitatively expansive, and methodologically as well as theoretically sophisticated apparatus ... has in most cases failed to predict at least the basic features of the dramatic changes, let alone their speed and forms”.⁵⁹ I would still argue that the attempt of local analysts to draw attention to the *continuities* in numerous social phenomena, such as the values and expectations of the population, its attitude to elites, trends in household furnishings and consumption strategies, including leisure time activities and, indeed, reading habits, could be seen as a challenge to simplified assumptions and conclusions about transition, regardless of whether they are celebratory or depressing, positive or negative.

⁵⁸ P. Blokker (2004), 870.

⁵⁹ P. Machonin (2005), 34, 14.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FREEDOM IN PRINT

The legacy of the forty years of an authoritarian, centralised, paternalistic state system not only co-shaped the post-1989 era, but also largely determined its specific nature. The sphere of cultural production and reception, including books, was among the areas most deeply scarred by the past, and these ‘scars’ were not just obstacles to establishing some kind of new ‘post-revolutionary’ ideal institutional system, but were actually constitutive elements of post-1989 development. As already noted, prior to 1989, it was the sphere of state-controlled publishing and distribution that dominated the nation’s book scene, as none of the alternative spheres – samizdat, exile publishing, or used book sales – was able to fully take its place. Despite internal conflicts in the system it continued to serve as the major supplier of reading material for the majority of the population and became one of the main arenas for the upcoming turnover. It was then the sphere of official publishing that served as an institutional space into which the old (i.e. centralised, state, ‘censored’, etc.) book order collapsed and, in tandem with what remained of the alternative publishing spheres, began to produce books in the new (private, ‘free’, decentralised, etc.) system.

It was again the literary establishment and its disintegration that, as one of the publicly most visible arenas, in a way represented the transformation of the entire book world, and as such a brief summary of the key turning points is warranted. Members of the top political and literary establishment continued to reproduce the stubborn make-up of the given order virtually until the very last days of the ‘old regime’.¹ Fears about the loss of certain privileges, such as access to prestigious posts, publishing opportunities, and above-standard honoraria, certainly served as incentives for the older generation to insist on the

¹ “Politické a kulturní souvislosti: Dílčí posuny od počátku osmdesátých let,” [The Political and Cultural Context: Partial Changes since the Beginning of the 1980s], in Pavel Janoušek et al. eds., *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989. Díl 4 (1969–1989)* [History of Czech Literature 1945–1989, Vol. 4, 1969–1989] (Prague: Academia, 2008), 44–56.

continuity of the established order, and also motivated the younger generation, who quickly learned to make the most of even mid-level positions in the complex power hierarchy. At the same time, however, alongside the literary establishment, alternative (though not necessarily oppositional) cultural activities, such as concerts by singer-songwriters, small-scale theatre productions in and outside Prague, and exhibitions of groups of visual artists continued to attract the attention of growing audiences due to the variety of these semi-official events.² There also emerged a gradual tendency for interaction between figures in the illegal, dissident and underground intellectual circles, those located, or more precisely put tolerated, within official academic institutions, and those dedicated to culture and the arts. For example, in 1988, the literary critic and translator Miroslav Červenka launched an unofficial 'evening university', conceived as a series of lectures and seminars terminating in a degree that was conferred on students by universities abroad. This project embraced lecturers and tutors who had been expelled from academia after 1968 (Alexander Stich, Jiří Brabec) as well as some who lectured at Charles University (Jaroslava Janáčková, Věra Menclová).³ Moreover, students who enrolled in a university in the 1980s, and thus did not share the post-1968 fears and frustrations of their parents' generation, were prepared to cross the boundaries between what was 'banned' and what was 'permitted'. Lectures and festivals organised under the formal supervision of the Youth Union (SSM), screenings of student work at FAMU, the Prague

² Among the songwriters who continually balanced at the edge between the permitted and banned existence was, for example, singer-songwriter, guitarist, poet, fiction writer and film director Vladimír Merta ('1946), singer-songwriter and poet Jakub Noha ('1950), singer-songwriter and fiction writer Vlastimil Třešňák ('1950), or to date the very popular singer-songwriter, composer and guitarist Jaromír Nohavica ('1953). Small-scale theatres included the Prague-based Studio Ypsilon, Činoherní klub, Semafor and Brno-based Hádíadlo and Divadlo na provázku. In the area of visual arts, the most active were Tvrdohlaví – a group of visual artists, photographers, illustrators, sculptors, stage designers and art glass designers who formally established themselves in 1987. Members included, for example, Jiří David ('1956), Petr Nikl ('1960), Zdeněk Lhotský ('1956), Jaroslav Róna ('1957) and František Skála ('1956), who all soon after 1989 were among the strongest and most visible actors of the post-1989 art scene. See "Politické a kulturní..." (2008), 44–56.

³ Without trying to turn this book into yet another memoir of an 'East European intellectual', I would like to use this opportunity and express my gratitude to both Dr. Jaroslava Janáčková and Dr. Věra Menclová, whom I was privileged to study under at Charles University, for the immense intellectual and moral strength they tirelessly showed both inside and outside the classroom.

film school, productions by drama students from the DAMU school theatre Disk, and the publication of student periodicals (*Kavárna*, *A.F.F.A.*): all these formed new socio-cultural spaces of relative independence, though still within the given limits, and platforms for diversified views and approaches.

Official and alternative circles mingled further on the pages of the samizdat periodical *Lidové noviny*, launched in January 1988.⁴ The popularity of the increasingly liberal and critical periodicals (*Ogoniok*, *Moskovskie novosti*), literature (Chinghiz Aitmatov, Anatoly Rybakov), and films that were coming out of Soviet Union during Perestroika continued to grow. These literary and media texts were no longer seen as tools of colonisation imposed on the local intellectual community, by an oppressive superpower but rather as signs of change, in both discursive and political terms. Part of the domestic media scene – professional periodicals (*Scéna*) and radio broadcasting in particular – managed to open up the door to previously excluded topics and personalities. While authors previously expelled from the Writers' Union (Bohumil Hrabal, Miroslav Holub, Václav Lacina, Aldolf Branald, etc.) were re-granted membership and the official publishing houses began publishing their work again, a younger generation of authors (Michal Černík) finally managed to reach the top positions in the Union's management and in the cultural sections of the Party's Central Committee (Jaroslav Čejka), and the older representatives of dogmatic trends resigned (Ivan Skála, Jan Kozák).

By late 1988 the authorities had stopped jamming the reception of Radio Free Europe and Deutschlandfunk, and consequently, along with growing number and print runs of samizdat periodicals, the level of public access to information significantly increased. The fruitless disputes and conflicts that took place between the conservatives (Jan Fojtík) and the pragmatics (Ladislav Adamec) at the top of the Party's hierarchy were out of step with developments in the public sphere. Despite the often brutal police attacks and further repressive action taken against key members of the opposition, including the re-imprisonment of Václav Havel, open public demonstrations and protests kept breaking out; for example, in August, October, and December of 1988,

⁴ See "Politické a kulturní..." (2008), 44–56. Even in this case, however, the regime manifested its paranoiac resistance to any change, and in a way, a total lack of insight into the actual dynamics of social and political currents, by imprisoning its two editors Jiří Ruml and Rudolf Zeman shortly prior to the 17 November 1989.

or during 'Palach's week' in January 1989. All these events and affairs that were shaking up the public almost daily added to the overall atmosphere of movement and expectation, to the "strange pre-revolutionary restlessness, that stuffy climate loaded with anticipation of changes, and at the same time, with fear from the repressions that were waiting to happen".⁵ At a plenary meeting of the Czech Writers' Union on 15–16 March of 1989, a writer named Jana Štroblová delivered the first open criticism of the Communists' cultural politics. The president of the Union, Michal Černík, made the first explicit call for a more inclusive approach to post-war literary history, for a revision of the lists of prohibited titles and authors, and thus *de facto* for the re-unification of the previously separated spheres of official and non-official literary production. The first bridges were built between official and exiled literati (Jiří Gruša, Petr Král), and consideration was given to publishing new editions of the legendary novels of the 1960s, such as Kundera's *The Joke* and Škvorecký's *The Cowards*. On 1 August 1989, the Czechoslovak PEN Club was re-established and open membership was offered to authors from every sphere of literary production, including non-official and exiled publishing.⁶

The wheel of history, however, rolled faster than Czech literati did. The petition *Několik vět* (A Few Sentences), signed by 40,000 people, most of them well-known artists and intellectuals, called for Havel's release from prison and for the resignation of the political elites, who were held responsible for the current state of affairs. Public protests in Czechoslovakia on 21 August and 28 October of 1989, the flood of thousands of East Germans into the West German Embassy in Prague trying to emigrate, the political upheavals in Hungary and Poland, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, all clearly signalled that the Communists' reign of power in the country was coming to an end. The regime was losing its 'subjects' and its legitimacy. Even after November 17, which symbolically marked the end of socialist Czechoslovakia, and after the Central Committee of the Communist Party resigned on

⁵ Jiří Suk, *Labyrintem revoluce: Aktéři, zápletky a křižovatky jedné politické krize (Od listopadu 1989 do června 1990)* [Through the Labyrinth of Revolution. Actors, Plots and Crossroads of One Political Crisis. From November 1989 to June 1990], (Prague: Prostor, 2003), 23.

⁶ See "Politické a kulturní..." (2008), 44–56. Czech PEN was originally established by Karel Čapek in 1925. See *České centrum Mezinárodního PEN klubu* [Czech Centre of the International PEN Club], <http://www.pen.cz/> (accessed 20 June 2008).

November 24, the by then archaic Writers' Union still failed to grasp the real course of events. In December 1989, authors from alternative circles and authors returning from exile established their own organisation, *Obec spisovatelů* (Community of Writers), headed by Ivan Klíma. The old union, whose major 'revolutionary' act consisted of changing its name to *Sdružení českých spisovatelů* (Society of Czech Writers), continued to stress the need to maintain some continuity with the pre-1989 order of things until it finally disintegrated the next year.

Although in the first years after 1989, the developmental steps that occurred – some of which failed while others succeeded – in the actual sphere of book production and reception remained incomplete, the specific dynamics of this very 'transitional' period (i.e. November 1989 – December 1993) can be roughly divided into three distinct stages.⁷ The first stage, which saw an immediate boom in the number of titles and copies, was followed by a second stage of relative decline in production, reflected mainly in shrinking print runs. The third stage marked the beginning of a gradual process of adaptation to the new, commercially oriented book regime, in particular to its institutional framework and managerial culture. The two key processes that took place during these three stages were the privatisation of the state-owned houses and the book sales and distribution systems and the rapid growth of new private and independent publishers. While the specific changes that occurred in the institutions connected with books will be discussed below, here a brief account of the key features of each of these three stages might be useful.

The first stage, which occurred in the months immediately after November 1989, was marked by an explosion in the number of book titles published, large print runs of selected titles, massive growth in the number of independent publishers, and, to some extent, by a general expansion of the book market. The first private publisher – today a well-established house called Paseka – was already registered by December 1989. During this first stage, books were produced jointly

⁷ One of the few local scholars who have systematically tried to monitor Czech publishing in the transition period, at least throughout the first half of the 1990s, Jan Halada, from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University, also distinguishes essentially three periods in the immediate post-1989 development of the book scene. See Jan Halada, *Transformace české knižní kultury 1990–1996* [Transition of Czech Book Culture 1990–1996], (Prague: FSV UK, 1996).

by the newly emerging independent publishers and what was then still the state-owned publishing sector, so they shared the market. The state houses that had formerly monopolised book production were the 'stone wall', both for their massive size and for the somewhat conservative nature of their operations, which resisted change. As early as November and December of 1989 the giant state publishers were forced to respond to the demands of book buyers and to the growing pressure placed on them by competition from the emerging private sector. These two forces fundamentally re-defined the market: production and distribution was no longer dictated by the amount of negotiation power the individual publishing subjects had over (printing, paper, etc.) resources, but rather by the (anticipated) demands of the consumers. Available statistical evidence presents an impressive story, especially when we consider that the re-established book market, which targeted the roughly 10 million Czech and 5 million Slovak inhabitants of former Czechoslovakia, was capable of absorbing Czech titles released in print runs of up to 250 000 to 500 000. But not only were these, by any standards, oversized print runs released, they also sold, at least for a short time after November 1989.

The seemingly bottomless market was also supplied by various 'one-off events', book ventures that – although conceptually this may not be the most accurate way of describing it – in the winter months of late 1989 and early 1990 were often driven by a shared 'revolutionary enthusiasm'.⁸ An example of a 'one-off event' that brought more books in to the market was the transport from Germany to Prague of 25 000 copies of a total of 250 titles produced in former exile publishing houses initiated by the Charter 77 Foundation. The employees of the

⁸ There seems to be a surprising lack of scholarly interest in these 'emotional' social phenomena, so they are a difficult topic to discuss. They include crowds dancing on Trafalgar Square at the end of the Second World War, East and West Germans hugging each other on the ruins of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Such images – extensively covered by the media and, one could even say, to some extent constructed by them – represent turning points. In a sense, more has been written about the 'post-revolutionary blues' than about the question of what preceded it. The November days of 1989 gave rise to all sorts of (both before and after) unimaginable and utopian social phenomena. One of the best examples was the fact that (some) Prague taxi drivers, otherwise notorious for their hostile attitude towards customers, provided their services free of charge during the very 'revolutionary' days. Whether ultimately initiated from below or orchestrated from above, these unique moments, when 'the wheel of history moves', are accompanied by such intense actions, emotions and experiences, incomparable to anything else experienced in the routine of everyday life.

distinguished The Čapek Brothers Bookstore in Prague, accompanied by their friends, unloaded all the books with their own hands over the course of one weekend night from the 8th to the 9th of December 1989.⁹ As one of the major newspapers noted, “this small gift, which still failed to fully meet the demands of the readers, was sold out in Vinohrady the following Monday and Tuesday”.¹⁰ From a more cynical perspective, the use of the word ‘gift’ in the media coverage of this story obscured the fact that, along with the collapse of the centrally controlled publishing industry in the country, what also collapsed was the market for exiled publishers and their production of books banned in their homeland. In simple terms, for the exile publishers this ‘gift’ was virtually the only way of getting rid of largely unsaleable stocks.¹¹

One of the few discussions of the ‘post-totalitarian’ book in the English-language media was a piece written for the *New York Review of Books* by the well known ex-dissident fiction writer Ivan Klíma, whose work was published prior to 1989 only in samizdat, by Czech exile publishing houses abroad and in English translation by renowned Anglo-American publishers.¹² To support some of the arguments he makes Klíma cites some figures on book publishing in his article, figures that would have shocked some best-selling international authors, even if they were unaware of the size of the potential readership they targeted: “In February 1990 after having been banned for twenty years, my first book came out in Prague. It was *My Merry Mornings*, and it was brought out by a practically unknown publisher who came to Prague immediately following the November revolution in 1989 from

⁹ It was particularly due to the charismatic personality of the bookseller Pert Koháček that this bookshop, based in a *fin de siècle* residential part of Prague, Vinohrady, became one of the first stores to establish a Western style of book promotion even prior to November 1989. The very fact that the venue had a name, that it was a recognisable identity, and the variety of activities it organised, such as book launches, readings and book signings, turned this small shop into a popular gathering place for Prague intellectuals and a unique cultural centre on its own.

¹⁰ Irena Gérová, “České knihy doma,” [Czech Books at Home], *Svobodné slovo* (13 December 1989): 5.

¹¹ Nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that a decade earlier people had been jailed for their involvement in almost the same activity, i.e. moving ‘heretic’ books across the border. And precisely that happened in 1980–1982 to one of the organisers of this ‘gift’ delivery – the sociologist and human rights activist Jiřina Šiklová.

¹² See, for example, Ivan Klíma’s novels *My First Loves* (London: Penguin Books, 1989; London: Chatto and Windus, 1986); *A Summer Affair* (London: Penguin Books, 1967; London: Chatto and Windus, 1987).

London, where he had published Czech literature in tiny editions. Although it was a book of short stories, he printed 100 000 copies and because the book quickly sold out he immediately printed another 50 000. At the same time, an established state publishing house brought out my novel *Love and Garbage*, also in an edition of 100 000. Later that year, three more of my books appeared, all of them written in the Seventies and Eighties: they too quickly sold out”¹³

Former dissident and exile literature topped the lists of previously ‘forbidden bestsellers’. The explosion of titles and print runs was to some extent made possible, as noted above, by the institutional structures inherited from the pre-1989 period, including the relatively low production costs, the ‘old’ prices of paper and printing services, and so on, but another legacy of the past, as Klíma’s account shows, was the relatively rich supply of texts available for publication, some of which had been waiting ‘in a drawer’ for decades to be released. Although the re-editions of literary texts enjoyed the highest print runs and also the greatest public visibility, ‘textual recycling’ went far beyond strictly literary production and included scholarly works, non-fiction, and a wide range of popular genres that had not appeared in bookstores since in some cases the 1940s. Some authors dusted off old texts that had never been published, and some of the new, private publishers simply reprinted official editions from the 1960s or texts previously released by exile publishers, often without wasting much time or money on substantial editing. As these texts sold out quickly, the new private publishers did not have to worry about actively searching for new or attractive titles requiring expensive marketing campaigns – at least not during the early post-revolution years.

The second stage in the early transformation period began approximately at the end of 1991. Participants and observers of the local ‘book revolution’ both saw this as a period of decline in the aftermath of the initial boom, a decline that was identified at the point where the maximum number of sellable copies had shrunk from hundreds of thousands to ‘just’ tens of thousands. Many publishers, inspired by their immediate post-November success and sometimes also by their quick profits, continued to release massive re-editions of previously unavailable

¹³ Ivan Klíma, “An Upheaval for Czech Readers,” *The New York Review of Books* (20 October 1994): 65–64. His *Láska a smetí* [Love and Garbage] was published by Alexander Tomský’s Rozmluvy (Purley) in 1988, and in 1990 by Československý spisovatel (Prague).

texts, including works by former dissident and exiled writers. At the same time, they faced criticism concerning the quality of the books, which were often edited and produced too quickly. The visible decline in professional standards (copyediting, layout, binding, etc.) was a by-product of the desire to immediately satisfy the market demand for as long as it lasted. It was the issue of survival in the context of growing competition rather than the publisher's reputation that dictated much of the decision-making. At this point, new publishers underestimated the value of long-term investments or consistent editorial policies. Despite the fact that the demand for previously restricted texts gradually faded over the course of 1991, some publishers managed to generate a solid profit during this brief revolutionary period.

Klíma's comments on this relative 'recession' period are tinged with a hint of disappointment: "... the publisher who had brought out *My Merry Mornings* published my novel *Judge on Trial* in a print run of 15 000 and managed to sell only two thirds of the copies".¹⁴ In other words, membership in the former *libri prohibiti* club was no longer a guarantee of commercial success. The key issue at this stage was to reintroduce the 'invisible hands' that would re-open the local market to a wider range of texts, which included books that did not contain any explicitly anti-communist message but had previously not been published and had been unavailable, as, often for rather mysterious reasons, they were deemed unfit for the 'common socialist reader'. As Klíma noted, "Popular commercial literature was almost entirely absent from the socialist market, which each year offered only a handful of crime novels ... and even smaller number of science fiction titles, and several substandard spy novels written by local authors...; erotic literature was strictly forbidden. ... Numerous readers who sought no more from their reading than suspense, or entertainment and who would have preferred love stories, thrillers, westerns, or erotica to serious literature, were thus left unsatisfied."¹⁵ A wide range of 'light reading' began accumulating on the portable tables of the street vendors who began springing up everywhere in local cities and towns. Urban centres resembled an open-air book fair as crowds of curious customers surrounded the vendors' tables. Anything considered a potential quick sale was on display: adventure novels on the American West,

¹⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵ Ibid., 64.

titles on magic and religious issues and on alchemy and oriental philosophy, guidebooks, cookbooks, dictionaries, and a wide range of 'how to' books. The streets were also flooded with piles of local and foreign pornographic books and magazines, which represented some of the most performative signs of a 'liberated', 'democratic', and censor-free culture.

The explosion in the number of texts that emerged in the early 'transitional' book market cannot be interpreted purely as a sign of the newly emerging differentiation of *mass* culture and *elite* culture or as a kind of counter-reaction to the pre-1989 homogenisation of cultural production. The interpretation of the 'new' book regime should take some account of what we could call consumer resistance to commercial interventions in the local book market. We can assume, as Roger Chartier does, that even under the new market conditions, "a [certain] gap existed between the norm and the real-life experience, between junction and practice, and between the sense intended and the sense constructed – a gap into which reformulations and procedures for avoidance could flow".¹⁶ To start with, street bookselling did not go unnoticed, as members of the local intellectual community vociferously lamented this unwanted 'child of the revolution' on the pages of the print media, even though, according to available surveys, only 18% of readers claimed that they actually preferred buying books this way when looking for one.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the street vendors also served the important role of filling the gap in the market left by the former state-run bookstores, which, at least in the first three years after 1989, decreased rapidly in number. The intellectuals may have hated the street vending, but in principle some publishers welcomed them for simple economical reasons. While a 'stone-wall' bookseller charged a 23% commission fee on each book sold, a vendor selling books on a table at the subway entrance gladly accepted 8% to 15%. With its quick turnover, minimal overhead, lower prices, and responsiveness to the demands of a wide range of customers, street vending was one of the first spontaneous expressions of the decentralised and free market.

¹⁶ R. Chartier, *Forms and Meanings. Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 86.

¹⁷ See the results of a readers' survey conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague, in Jan Halada and Hynek Jeřábek, "Čtenář a ti ostatní. Čtenáři a knihkupci ve výzkumu II," [The Reader and the Others. Readers and Booksellers in Research II], *Nové knihy* 19 (1995): 8.

To some extent it was a primitive but illustrative, textbook example of open competition that was visible to everyone whenever they left home, an example of the very principles that were suppressed by the centrally controlled sale of books. In this way, even books of questionable quality, free of any approvals or restrictions, played a role in expanding the notions of what was socially possible and acceptable.

In the second stage of the early transition period it was not so much book production itself that 'cooled down' as it was the 'revolutionary' expectations imposed upon the newly developing book market. At this point, it was becoming evident that the collapse of the centrally controlled system in virtually every sphere of people's lives not only eliminated restrictions and instructions, but also, along with them, tools of security and co-ordination, regardless of how imaginary these were in reality. The boom and expansion of book production in the early post-revolutionary period was gradually replaced by increased calls to introduce new rules into the publishing and bookselling game, which would make it possible to operate in the 'new order'. It was during the third stage, the beginnings of which stem from approximately early 1992, that the consequences of the preceding 'chaotic' expansion of the publishing scene in terms of both the number of books and the subjects involved in book production became more and more acute. By this time, the market was jammed with the titles, authors, and genres that were produced in the post-1989 boom but no longer demanded by book buyers. Promotional devices that had previously proved powerful (books bearing the names of previously 'oppressed' authors) were losing their commercial clout. Klíma, who noted that the novel he published before Christmas 1993 "sold *only* 5 000" (*italics mine*), was not alone in realising that things had changed.¹⁸ For publishers, it was no longer about getting their business started; the main agenda of the day was to develop a survival strategy and elaborate techniques for adapting to the post-boom conditions.

Smaller publishers tried to prevent, or at least postpone, bankruptcy by using cheaper paper and lower quality binding, and a favourite strategy was to ignore copyright and publish without first seeking permission. As one of the few local legal experts on copyright noted, the "transition from the command economy to a market-oriented economy generates temporary *chaos*, when old things are disappearing and

¹⁸ I. Klíma (1994), 64.

all the new things are still being born ... In the process of implementing the gradual changes in relations, it will be important to continually re-examine the extent to which those aspects that used to serve as a guarantee of copyright have completely lost their role, or to what extent their role has only changed, and which of these questions are to be resolved from the new perspective of the market economy”.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the market and book consumers were pushing for change. At the end of 1992, Ivo Železný, the most visible success-story of Czech post-1989 publishing, summed up the character of this period by suggesting that those whose aim had been to make a profit by publishing bestsellers had already left the market, and a year later he announced to the media that “in the current economic situation, small or even medium-size publishers have no chance of survival”.²⁰ In other words, the impressive book boom after 1989, whether seen as an opportunity to fulfil a spiritual mission or as a unique opportunity to make money fast, was short-lived and over by the end of 1992.

The figures presented below offer one way of illustrating the overall dynamics of book production in the decade after 1989. They also show the difference between the first half of the 1990s – a period that was described as a ‘book boom’ by some and as ‘book chaos’ by others – and the second half of the 1990s, i.e. a period that gradually began to show some signs of stabilisation, not just in terms of book production itself, but also in terms of sales and readership. The data on publishing subjects also tell a unique story: between January 1989 and June 1990 the number of publishers operating in the Czech and Moravian parts of former Czechoslovakia increased almost tenfold and by December 1992 there were more than 1500, and some sources even estimated that up to 3000 publishers were operating in the country by that year. Although the Český statistický úřad (Central Statistical Office) cites somewhat lower figures, the massive growth in the number of publishing enterprises is obvious.

The number of ‘post-revolutionary’ publishers and the volume of their production cited above are impressive, but on reflection the table raises questions about how well figures can truly capture the reality of

¹⁹ Irena Holcová, “Aktuální otázky nakladatelských smluv v čs. Praxi,” [Current Questions on Publishing Contracts in Czech Practice], *Aktuální otázky práva autorského a práv průmyslových* (Prague: Karlova Universita, 1992), 71.

²⁰ Ivo Železný in an informal interview in September 1992. From an interview with Ivo Železný in Lubor Kasal, “Chci si hrát,” [I Want to Play], *Tvar* 23 (1993): 7.

Number of publishers, printed titles, and books between 1988 and 2002

	No. of publishers in the CR (total in CR & SR)	No. of titles in CR only (total CR&SR)	No. of copies in CR only*	Fiction in the CR titles/ books*
1988	45 (70)	3803 (6977)	73 788	586/16 769
1989	45 (70)	3767 (6863)	76 198	643/19 941
1990	550 (900)	4136 (6870)	75 625	553/22 672
1991	1080 (1630)	6057 (9362)	? ^{**}	
1992	1520 (2120)	6743		1936/? ^{**}
1993 ^{***}	1700	8203		2433
1994	1810	9309		3408
1995	2857	8994		3214
1996	2251	10 244		3104
1997		11 519		
1998	2582	11 738		3432
1999	2745	12 551 ^{****}		3562
2000	2898	11 965		3281

* In thousands.

** Since 1991 data on the number of books produced have not been available.

*** Czechoslovakia split into two independent countries, the Czech Republic (CR) and Slovakia (SR), on 1 January 1993.

**** Before 1999 the figures on published titles included planned titles even if they were not published. Since 1999 the figures refer only to titles that were actually published and were recorded in the respective database only once the publisher had submitted a mandatory copy from each print run to the National Library.

Sources: *Statistické informace. Řada 21 – Kultura* (Statistical Information. Line 21 - Culture), Prague: Český statistický úřad, 1988, 1993; Materials of the Ministry of Culture; Databases of the ISBN of the National Library; *Statistická ročenka ČR 1993–2001* (Statistical Yearbook CR 1993–2001).

publishing. Some differences in the numbers of titles recorded derive from differences in how books are defined. The ISBN National Agency tends to cite higher figures, since the ISBN category of 'non-periodical publications' also includes books less than 42 pages in length, such as pop-up picture books and sheet music. Also, it must be taken into account when interpreting these data that the definition of a publisher has also changed over time. Not every book-publishing entity was registered, and those that were not may not be included in the statistics.

Similarly, not every entity registered as a 'publisher' ever produced a single volume. This was made possible by the relatively liberal legislation that allowed registration of a variety of subjects producing printed matter. By the late 1990s, when most of the people involved in the book business were talking about the relative stabilisation and even concentration of the book market, a much smaller number of registered 'publishers' was actually publishing work in print.

The real figures on the productivity of publishing entities tend to diverge from official estimates and statistics. While, for example, in 1994 the Ministry of Culture had records of the existence of 2805 publishers in the country, only 495 publishing houses could be identified as engaged in continuous production.²¹ Out of the 2745 publishers recorded in 1999, just 1270 companies were actually publishing books, and only 200 of them were responsible for publishing four-fifths of the total book production. The concentration of publishing continued further: in 2002 only around 150 publishers had the capacity to publish more than twenty titles a year, and only about 35 publishers managed to produce more than one hundred titles a year.²² The most productive among them have been the university presses, who have traditionally published large numbers of different paperbound teaching notes and textbooks in smaller print runs. If we exclude the university publishers from the overall figures, only about 20 local houses produce over 100 titles a year, and these leading publishers cover one-fourth of the entire local production. If data on print runs were available, the share of the market taken up by these publishers would perhaps be even larger. It must also be noted that even the data provided by highly respected national sources, such as the ISBN National Agency, do not fully reflect the reality of the book market. According to the ISBN, approximately one-sixth of the registered publishers went out of business within the first decade of 'liberated' publishing, but the existing registration system was unable to precisely record the respective changes. In addition,

²¹ Václav Šmejkal, 'Kniha výdaj člověka' [Book - Man's Expense], *Ekonom* 39/10 (1995): 31.

²² See the yearbook *Almanach Labyrint* (Prague: Labyrint, 1992–2009), a directory of publishers (including a list of books published during the respective year), book-stores, book-selling and distribution companies, edited by Joachim Dvořák, based on data provided by the respective companies themselves. The physical appearance of the yearbook itself suggests significant change: while the first *Almanach* of 1992 was a 307-page paperback printed on low-quality paper, the one of 1993 in hardcover with 430 pages, and in 1997 Dvořák published a hardcover 600-page yearbook.

materials from the Czech Statistical Office note that, for example, out of 290 Slovak publishers approached in 1991 with a request to provide information on their production, only 63% responded and submitted the requested data.²³

Thus general statistics cannot provide a full picture of the complex transformation of the book world. Even the massive print runs (at least in relation to the size of potential local readership) of some selected titles in the initial response to the revolutionary events of 1989 are barely reflected in the overall numbers of titles and copies produced during the early transition period. The statistically recorded increase in titles produced in the Czech Republic itself was less than 400 (3767 to 4136) and the overall number of produced copies (no longer monitored after 1991) even dropped slightly between 1989 and 1990 (from 76.198 million to 75.625). Judging from the available figures, it seems that, in terms of the overall numbers of titles, book production reacted to the political changes gradually without any obvious jumps or dramatic changes. The first significant and noticeable quantitative shift can be identified in 1991, when the number of registered titles reached 6,000. Paradoxically, that was also the point when many people in the business began claiming (both privately and in the media) that the publishing boom was subsiding and warned of an impending production crisis.

One of the reasons why the 'book revolution' had no immediate effect on the number of published titles as recorded in statistics, and the examples quoted from the publishers' archives clearly demonstrate this, was that within the few months after November 1989, 'new' titles were replacing the 'old' ones. Books that were already included in the publisher's editorial plans prior to November 1989 were removed from the production waiting list in order to make way for titles in demand from the newly developing market and its consumers. Both the giant state-run houses and the growing number of independent publishers were at the outset all dependent on the capacity of the same printing facilities and paper producing sources, which were still controlled by the state. There were some benefits from the residua of the command economy, such as regulated paper prices and production costs, which for several months kept book prices at a level close to pre-1989 prices.

²³ *Statistická ročenka České a Slovenské federativní republiky* [Statistical Yearbook of the CSFR], (Prague: Federální statistický úřad, 1991).

It was thus the *continuity* of the past, not the sudden break with it that enabled the post-revolutionary transition to take its course by providing the necessary social, intellectual, cultural, and even economic capital to back up the ‘revolutionary’ events. General statistics tend therefore to refer more to the continuity of the past than the chaos articulated in the narratives about the ‘revolution’.²⁴ Although numerical data may not be able to provide an entirely accurate picture of the transformation of book production, they at least reveal some of the leading features of post-1989 development. Information on the total number of printed copies is only available to 1991, but the data show that after 1990 there was a clear trend towards publishing more titles but in limited print runs – a trend that contrasted sharply with the publishing policy of the centrally controlled system.

A key turning point in the period just after 1989, and one that received intense public attention, considerably reinforced by the local media, was the privatisation of state-run publishing houses. As I noted elsewhere, privatisation practices in general, including the practices applied in the sphere of cultural production, cannot be examined as something exclusive to the ‘post-communist’ environment.²⁵ Even cultural analysts dealing with socio-cultural contexts outside the region of the former Soviet-bloc countries saw privatisation as “one of the main engines of change at the end of this [the 20th] century”.²⁶ Privatisation thus cannot be understood purely as a consequence of the collapse of the communist governments, and must instead be seen as a trend affecting national cultural economies worldwide, at least since the

²⁴ The actual structure of post-1989 production overall should perhaps also be mentioned. The share of fiction books out of total production grew from approximately 13% in the late 1980s to 30% in the mid-1990s, becoming relatively stable around 25% by the end of the decade. More detailed statistics indicate that while over 90% of the local production was printed in the Czech language, translations, mostly from English (over half of the translated texts), German, and French represented roughly 30% of the total production. The above-noted university teaching notes and textbooks represented 10% to 12% of the country’s total production of titles. See the site of the Union of Czech Booksellers and Publishers in reference to the ISBN agency at <http://www.sckn.cz>.

²⁵ Jiřina Šmejkalová, “Unbinding Books: Publishing in the Czech Republic,” in Peter Boorsma, Annemoon van Hemel and Niki van der Wielen, eds., *Privatisation and Culture: Experiences in the Arts, Heritage and Cultural Industries?*, based on a joint project of the European Union, Dutch Boekmanstichting and CIRCLE (Boston / Dordrecht / London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 142–159.

²⁶ P. Boorsma, et al., 1998, 20.

late 1980s. Debates on the privatisation of cultural industries have embraced a wide range of issues, from the passionate defence of private investment to their radical rejection, which in the case of cultural industries is represented by the famous argument against 'prostituting culture'. Defenders tend to emphasise the increased motivation of managers and the greater efficiency and quality of their professional performance resulting from privatisation. They also highlight the improved quality of services and the stimulation of innovation, budgetary advantages, and greater room for public control. Some authors, however, have argued that efficiency is more a result of increasing competition and thus cannot be simply attributed to a certain type of ownership of a particular company.²⁷ Privatisation can also increase production costs, owing to the higher incomes of both employees and managers, and can generate a decline in quality and lead to unemployment, as privatised companies tend to cut the size of their workforce. In addition, it can also result in sloppy attitudes towards non-economic motives, such as ecological concerns and – particularly important in the case of cultural institutions – concerns for national cultural heritage.

Many authors have pointed out that the concepts of the 'state' and 'ownership' were defined differently in the command economies than they were in market-oriented economies.²⁸ In the command economies the 'state' was understood not just as the exclusive owner that then delegated power to the lower levels, but also as a body of pressure groups competing for control over 'national' property. In that context 'ownership' did not refer to a set of transparent legal frameworks, but rather to the level of bargaining power of various interest groups over resources. The shift in emphasis from the distribution and sales of goods to a struggle over *resources* is crucial for understanding not just the centrally controlled cultural system itself, but also its later transformation. As noted above, the space for individual decision-making and access to available resources varied significantly between different

²⁷ Robert Millward and David M. Parker, "Public and Private Enterprise: Comparative Behaviour and Relative Efficiency," in Robert Millward et al., eds., *Public Sector Economics* (London and New York: Longman, 1983), 199–274. Quoted in P. Boorsma, et al. (1998), 35.

²⁸ For an account of the operation of state ownership in command economies, see J. Kornai, *The Socialist System. The Political Economy of Communism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

sectors of social and cultural production and different countries of the region.²⁹ Considering the conservatism of the local ‘normalisation’ establishment, the political motives for privatisation were – particularly in the case of Czech cultural production – perhaps even more important than the economic ones, which assumed that only clearly defined property relations could guarantee economic efficiency and consequent profit and could make the operation of particular companies more transparent. Privatisation was generally understood as a means to the de-politicisation and de-centralisation of cultural and public life. It was also seen as a basic guarantor of the democratic exchange of ideas and as a tool of protection against the possible revival of neo-communist tendencies in society. According to the liberal outlook that prevailed at that time, the free market was also supposed to guarantee free access to information. The privatisation of cultural industries, including publishing, was expected to play a key role in opening up this access. Nonetheless, the actual privatisation process showed – not just the privatisation of prominent state-owned publishing houses, but also, for example, of film studios – that installing the allegedly almighty ‘invisible hands of the market’ was much more complex than originally expected.³⁰ Consequently, privatisation practices, particularly in the cultural arena, were also exposed to a wide range of critical attacks.³¹

²⁹ In comparison to Hungary or Poland, socialist Czechoslovakia – especially after 1968 – had one of the most rigid political and economic systems, with only 4% of industrial enterprises in private hands. See John C. Coffee, Jr., “Institutional Investors in Transitional Economies: Lessons from the Czech Experience,” in Roman Frydman, Cheryl W. Gray and Andrzej Rapaczynski, eds., *Corporate Governance in Central Europe and Russia, Vol. I*. (Budapest, London, New York: Central European University Press, 1996).

³⁰ The Czech film industry was socialised right after the end of the Second World War, that is, *prior* to the communist coup in 1948. Beyond the undeniable political and cultural liberalisation processes of the 1960s, it was – among other things – also the centrally funded film industry, relatively free of market pressures, that made the experimental film of the so-called Czech New Wave possible. See, for example, Mira Liehm and Antonin J. Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film after 1945* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1977). Following 1989, passionate discussions over the privatisation of the major film studio Barrandov, so-called Prague Hollywood, divided local filmmakers into two mutually irreconcilable camps: mostly younger film makers with strong commercial interests on the one hand, and on the other, the generation that grew out of the 1960s, including the Oscar-winning film director Jiří Menzel, who were defending local tradition of public funding of ‘national’ film.

³¹ For example, in his work on Czech transition society, Pavel Machonin included a short text on cultural issues titled “Tools of Distributing Spiritual Culture”.

The complex outcomes of the privatisation process cannot be interpreted purely as a clash between romantic socialist visions and ruthless commercial interests. As economists observed, even in economies with a more advanced and stable market infrastructure than the 'transitional' ones, such rapid and large-scale privatisation would have been unrealistic.³² Nevertheless, a conflict between what was expected from privatisation and its real social and cultural impact marked many of the transition stories of local cultural institutions. Such conflicts between often naïve expectations and actual privatisation, combined with a lack of professional reflection on the social impact of the processes, coloured the debates surrounding the privatisation of the state-owned publishing houses. It could even be said that the transformation of these massive state companies and their subsequent failure to compete in the local book market signalled and mimicked some of the general transitional trends in society and the economy after 1989. In the state-run 'stone-wall' publishing houses, with inflexible and lengthy production, high overhead costs, and oversized staffs, the managers were aware of the residua from the pre-1989 arrangement, and thus, shortly after 1989, they tried to adapt to the new market conditions. Changes included reducing the number of employees and the number of titles in their editorials plans, and even cutting the time needed for releasing a book from the previously common period of two years to just a few months or even weeks. Many of these changes, though, were of a quantitative nature and as such had limited impact on the quality of the operation. Transforming the established operating style of these

The analysis assumes a very personal, subjective style – sharply contrasting with the objective and depersonalised style of the rest of the book – in its references to “so-called mass culture ... which poses a threat to humanitarian and moral values”. In a footnote he noted that at the beginning of the 1990s he was asked “to comment on material prepared for the Czech government by the current Minister of Culture. Its logic was as follows: the *best art* and highest *cultural values* can only emerge under the conditions of creative freedom. This means that the state should not interfere in the production and distribution of cultural values, perhaps with the exception of some of the *most valuable* cultural institutions ... all the rest should be a matter of private activity. *Fortunately*, the attempt to prevent the privatisation of libraries, galleries, museums, theatres and other cultural institutions then succeeded. ... Nonetheless, what *fell* were the majority of cultural centres, publishing houses, journals and – despite the resistance of many artists – also state-run film.” (*Italics mine*) P. Machonin (2005), 235.

³² See Timothy P. Ash and Anna Canning, “Privatization in the Former Centrally Planned Economies,” in Jackson Peter McLeod and Catherine Waddams Price, eds., *Privatization and Regulation. A Review of the Issues* (London, New York: Longman, 1994), 213–236.

giant companies was a lengthy process, and the relatively slow tempo of the alterations made in the state houses did not quite follow the speed of the transformation of the book market. Calls for deeper structural change emerged and privatisation then seemed the most obvious answer. More than ten of the forty state houses were included in the first wave of privatisation of the national industry.

The privatisation of Czech industries consisted of four major components and all of them were also in some way related to the book business.³³ The first component included the restitution of properties like real estate, small factories, shops, and land confiscated by the communist government after 1948. Even this phase had an indirect impact on the book business, as publishing houses and bookshops located in restituted buildings were faced with insolvency, in part because of their outdated business models, in part because of overwhelming competition, but mainly because of the financial stress of escalating commercial rents and the lengthy and expensive legal battles that often accompanied the restitution process. The second component, so-called small-scale privatisation of retailers and workshops in public auctions, affected the state-run central wholesale company *Knižní velkoobchod*, which became an object of still largely unexplained transactions and speculations. A number of bookshops, often overloaded with unsaleable stock, also went into public auction, with rather predictable results – only a limited number managed to survive, and that led to a (temporary) decline in the number of bookshops all over the country. The third component was the removal of restrictions on private enterprise. This led to a massive increase in self-employment and was what made the above-mentioned boom in independent publishing possible. The fourth component was the large-scale privatisation that was applied in two waves and targeted major state-owned assets in industry, agriculture, and trade, including the state publishers. The government – then run by the Prime Minister Václav Klaus – introduced a ‘voucher scheme’ to allow all local adult citizens to compete with the international investors. Until 1995, the entire privatisation process was considered a success by both domestic and international experts.

As in many other areas of the national economy, the state – in the case of book-related enterprises represented by the Ministry of Culture –

³³ J. Šmejkalová (1998), 142–159.

remained the key player in the privatisation process.³⁴ The houses that underwent privatisation were owned either directly by the state, such as Odeon, the renowned publisher of translated literature, and Československý spisovatel, a publishing house that focused on domestic literature, or by state-controlled organisations, such as Mladá Fronta, which published books for younger audiences and had previously operated under the Socialist Union of Youth (an umbrella organisation tied directly to the Communist Party whose purpose was to unify and control youth activities). A variety of models have been applied in the privatisation of cultural industries in Europe, but not all of them were appropriate for the Czech publishing industry. The buyout method was out of the question in most cases because state publishing houses were too large and their managers had little capital of their own. To some extent the 'arm's-length' model was adopted in the case of Mladá Fronta, where the state retained formal ownership through the Fund for Children and Youth.

The British 'golden share' model, where the owner/state retains "the power to insist that the company be run in a prescribed way", was used in the case of Albatros, a leading local publisher of literature for children, in order to preserve its unique editorial profile.³⁵ Most of the state-owned houses were privatised in procedures similar to those applied in the case of other larger companies in the national economy. The ideal scenario went as follows. First, the managers of the given publishing house were invited to prepare a privatisation project designed with the assistance of the Ministry of Culture. The project included an estimate of assets, a definition of the various stages of reorganisation of the company, and a plan for its future development. The design stage was followed by the given ministry's open call for tenders. A special committee further evaluated potential candidates, and members of this committee proposed the winning investor. It was then the state – represented by the Ministry of Privatisation, which later turned into the National Property Fund – that signed the sale contract. Especially in the case of specialised publishers, this contract included a commitment to retain their original editorial portfolio.

³⁴ See Jaroslav Císař, "Situace v české knižní kultuře a Ministerstvo kultury ČR," [The Situation in Czech Book Culture and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic], *Český literární almanach* 1996 (Prague: Litera, 1996), 10–13.

³⁵ *Dictionary of Economics* (London: Routledge, 1992), 193.

Although the privatisation of publishing companies to a large extent echoed the main characteristics of general privatisation processes applied in other areas of the local economy, it was marked by numerous specific features. One such feature was the resistance of Czech book production to international investment, a resistance that was in sharp contrast with, for instance, the situation in Hungary, where 80% of non-fiction publishers were in the hands of companies like Bertelsmann, Julius Springer, Wolters, and Kluwer as early as the mid-1990s.³⁶ On the one hand, publishing 'our books' without 'foreign money' was a welcome contrast to the 'corrupt' print media (yet to be addressed), but on other hand, there was a serious lack of domestic capital. The undercapitalised area of publishing and bookselling generated a fiscal 'culture' of delayed payments among all the subjects involved. This generated a domino effect of indebtedness between subjects in the book-publishing chain that few publishers were able to avoid. One of the reasons was that, owing to an unrealistic estimation of assets, the newly privatised publishers became trapped in a vicious circle of financial obligations with printers, distributors, and booksellers. Incompetent and perhaps not always well-meaning decisions made by some profit-seekers may have played a role here, too. In addition, centrally allocated subsidies were gone and the private funding of publishing projects was nearly non-existent in the earlier stages of the transition. Newly established independent publishers, which were growing daily in number, intensified the pressure of competition. Also, many of the former state houses retained the inflexible institutional infrastructure they inherited from the pre-1989 operations. The mere fact of a shift in ownership did not mean that they were ready to abandon this legacy.

From a purely economic point of view, what the investor 'bought out', however, were often debts rather than something that could be defined as property. At the same time, since Prague-based publishers in particular were often housed in attractive, central locations in the

³⁶ See Péter Gaal, "The Pitfalls of Privatizing Hungary's Publishers," *Transition* 3/1 (10 January 1997): 45. As one prominent publisher, Tamás Miklós, put it, "when Hungary is the focal theme at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1999, Bertelsmann and Wolters Kluwer will represent Hungarian publishers". Tamás Miklós quoted in Rüdiger Wischenbart, "Publishing in Central and South Eastern Europe. Second Report of the Krems Circle," delivered at the 1997 Frankfurt Book Fair. Available at http://www.wischenbart.com/de/essays__interviews_rw/krems_report.htm (accessed 27 June 2007).

city, investors were often more interested in the building the publisher occupied than in publishing itself. The value of the real estate, which in some cases came as part of the privatisation package, was often several times greater than that of the company. The notion of 'property' in this privatisation process thus also requires some further explanation. The main assets of a state-run publisher usually consisted of the know-how, qualifications and experience of the editorial staff, publishing projects-in-progress, contracted and edited manuscripts, and the databases of their subscribing customers. A publisher's wealth was defined more by its intellectual and symbolic capital than strictly its financial capital. In addition, once a publishing house was prepared to enter privatisation, much of their best-qualified and experienced editorial staff had already left. These editors would have set up their own businesses or would have been recruited by the most powerful new private publishers. They took with them their competence, the contacts they had with 'their' authors, mailing lists, and even some already edited manuscripts waiting to be published.

The transitional Czech economy of the 1990s introduced a new term into world economic theory: *vytunelování* or 'tunnelling out'. The term was invented to refer to the phenomenon of stripping a bank or a company of its assets. It could be said that the intellectual and human capital of the large publishers was 'tunnelled out' even *before* any official or legal transfer of ownership had begun. For example, Jan Šmatlák, one of many in a series of directors that ran Odeon after 1989, noted that in 1993, when he was appointed to head Odeon, he tried to take an inventory of its assets, as it was previously a major publisher of translated texts. He described the outcome of his efforts as "... depressing. The intellectual property of Odeon, i.e. a depository of manuscripts and half-finished projects, was found to be very thin. How this occurred is easily divined by looking at similarities with other collapsing publishers, as Odeon's titles started emerging in the hands of other publishers".³⁷ In other words, the editors of the former state houses tried to 're-invest' themselves the social and intellectual capital they had 'tunnelled' out of their former institutions. This is not to say that the entire new publishing scene was dependent on resources that originated in the former state sector. But it is no coincidence that, for example, the successful new publisher Ivo Železný worked for Odeon before

³⁷ Josef Šmatlák, "Odeon v čase trosek," [Odeon in a Time of Ruin], *Knihkupec a nakladatel* V (XIX)/3 (2000): 10.

1989. Alongside his obvious business talent and ability to adapt rapidly to the new market conditions, it could be said that it was his previous professional experience at Odeon and his university education, both acquired prior to 1989, that to a large extent contributed to his new career. Železný is not the only example that supports the argument that the *continuity* of the symbolic, intellectual and social capital accumulated during the decades of ‘normalisation’ helped facilitate the transformation of the local book scene. Once the privatised ‘stone-wall’ houses were stripped of the social and symbolic assets they had accumulated in the previous era, they were gradually edged out of the newly established book market. With only a few exceptions, most of these houses had been knocked out of the competitive market by the second half of the 1990s.

There are methodological challenges involved in attempting even to outline the transition stories of particular Czech publishers. Brian McNair identified similar challenges in his analyses of the contemporary Russian media scene, noting that “changes which took a century of capitalist development in Europe or North America have unfold in Russia in less time than it takes to research, write, and see published an academic monograph”. Moreover, it must be considered that “the events in contemporary Russia are rarely as they seem on the surface ... Openness and transparency in matters of ownership and control of the media (and of capital in general) are elusive, a problem complicated by the fact that disinformation and propaganda are regularly used against opponents in the struggles for control of the media which have dominated the post-1991 years”.³⁸ A condensed illustration of largely comparable difficulties may be derived from the stories of several former state-operated houses, such as Mladá fronta, the SPN (State Pedagogical Publisher), Komenium, and the key domestic fiction publisher Československý spisovatel, stories which could be at least partially reconstructed on the basis of media coverage and, when available, archival resources.

During much of the 1990s, Mladá fronta seemed to represent one of the few success stories among the privatised state houses. In 1996 it was the 18th most-productive publisher, with 65 titles released in just that year. A number of issues contributed to this achievement, among

³⁸ Brian McNair, “Power, Profit, Corruption, and Lies: The Russian Media in the 1990s,” J. Curran, et al., eds. (2002), 79–80.

them a stable editorial profile, the charismatic personality of its editor-in-chief, Vladimír Pistorius, and his highly qualified staff, and the continued formal presence of the state in the house's ownership through the Fund of Children and Youth (FDM). Nonetheless, by the late 1990s, the house's FDM assets went on sale and Mladá fronta was part of this transaction. As late as April 2005, a serious local newspaper noted in a mystery-like tone: "companies who bought out the real estate which used to belong to the Fund of Children and Youth (FDM) are backed by an entrepreneurial group around the publishing house Mladá fronta. Four years ago, this famous publisher still belonged to the FDM, and its sale was also accompanied by a number of unclear issues".³⁹ The publishing house was one of the most valuable ventures of the FDM, which was set up by the government in the early 1990s to manage the property of the former Socialist Union of Youth (SSM). Its market value was approximately two milliard Czechoslovak Crowns, and its assets included some very valuable real estate. Its value made it a target of substantial asset stripping. In August 2001, the publishing house was sold in auction for 21.6 million to a relatively new and unknown company, and Pistorius, the editor-in-chief, was fired, despite passionate, medialised protests from the intellectual community. The sale went through, even though one day before the auction the Minister of Finance had issued a personal letter forbidding the sale. No one involved in the auction and none of the company's representatives were willing to talk to the media, and by early 2005 the case had become the subject of a police investigation.

The privatisation of SPN, formerly a publisher of school textbooks, provides another example of a well-publicised but foggy and exceedingly complicated story. The privatisation of SPN had all the typical features that characterised this process after 1989 – conflicts over real estate, unfair business practices aimed at exploiting legal loopholes, a shortage of initial capital, difficulties coping with the new market conditions, controversial and largely ineffective state interventions, and, most importantly, the deliberate misrepresentation of the story in the media. It is not hard to understand why there was so much interest in what was happening to this branch of publishing. Schoolbook and textbook production traditionally enjoyed a more or less guaranteed

³⁹ Radek Kedroň, "Majetek fondu: stopy míří k vydavatelství," [The Property of the Fund: the Trail Leads to the Publisher], *Hospodářské noviny* (7 April 2005): 4.

outlet and stable profits. In 1992, as SPN slipped towards bankruptcy, it mortgaged its two buildings in the centre of Prague – the only valuable property it had – for credit, and, as it remained insolvent, it was privatised a year later.

The new investor settled this debt and immediately sold both buildings to a company in which he himself was a major shareholder. Soon after, the SPN company was forced to rent offices from the owner of the building it had once owned. The investor withdrew responsibility for the future operation of the collapsing SPN, while simultaneously running a newly established and highly successful publishing house called Fortuna, which specialised in – perhaps not surprisingly – textbooks. The state prosecuted the investor for renegeing on its commitment to maintain SPN's original editorial profile, as required in the privatisation contract, and for what was essentially the illegal sale of its real estate, and it opened up bidding for a new investor. By the time the knot of legal and property conflicts was disentangled, the textbook market was already flooded with books published by the growing number of other private publishers, alongside the successful Fortuna.

Another example of a complex transition story can be found in the records of a company called Komenium (1989–1991), and this example may also offer some insight into the post-1989 dissolution of the state-controlled system.⁴⁰ Komenium's main responsibility was to act as the central supplier to schools of teaching aids and equipment, including printed matter. The records show that lists of items schools needed were approved centrally, assessed in terms of both quality and quantity, and financed from a total budget of approximately 100 million Czechoslovak Crowns a year. The Ministry of Education allocated sums from this budget to the schools, and local and district authorities

⁴⁰ For the company's archives, see "Komenium" in Národní archiv (National Archive - NA), 6th Department. The publishers' archives are unprocessed and only partially accessible, 177 archival boxes in total. These include fragmentary documents on organisational and legal matters from the years (1949), 1963–1993 (1994). According to the internal archival descriptive notes, the files consisted of a rather large amount of materials that were delivered to the NA in a "chaotic state" owing to the time constraints and difficult circumstances under which the relocation of the materials took place. For information on the National Archives (i.e. the state administration office and the central state archives controlled by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic), see <http://www.nacr.cz/>. Internal materials, further information on the publisher's files, and access to unprocessed files were kindly provided by Jan Kahuda, archivist at the NA.

also contributed to the local and district school budgets (the sum of all local and district funding would have equalled around 50 million Czechoslovak Crowns). The minutes from meetings of the company's management in 1989 still follow the standard pattern of listing routine operational issues, such as staff development, salaries, complaints, electricity bills, and general economic matters. Reports on economic issues in the first half of 1989, however, already indicate shortfalls in planned deliveries due to delays in the allocation of financial resources, constant changes to the schools' orders, and unspecified 'production difficulties' experienced by the company's suppliers.⁴¹ Reports in the summer of 1989 continue to refer to "growing difficulties with sales and purchases".⁴² The minutes from a meeting held on the 6 November 1989 still include points about "cooperation with the local committee of the Communist Party".⁴³ The first visible change in the documents from November 1989 is that on the list of the permanent members of the company's senior management two items are pre-typed but crossed out by hand: representatives of the local organisation of the Party and of the Socialist Union of Youth.⁴⁴ In other words, while production-related issues began surfacing in the records already prior to November 1989, the performative commitment to the Party-driven rhetoric continued to fill the pages of the management's documentation right up until just before the November events. And while the 'first revolutionary act' of the company was condensed into deleting the reference to the leading role of the Party from its records, the actual managerial and structural consequences of abolishing the centrally controlled system were yet to be faced.

As records of meetings held already at the beginning of 1990 indicate, there are shifts in both discourse and substance indicating that Komenium's management was soon forced to react to the changes. Already in February 1990 the company's records contain an 'assumption'

⁴¹ See "Zpráva o výsledcích rozboru hospodářské činnosti n.p. Komenuim za 1. čtvrtletí r. 1989," [Report on the Economic Results of n.c. Komenium for the First Trimester of 1989], 15–16. In Národní archiv, "Komenium," Box 15.

⁴² See "Zápis z porady vedení n.p. Komenium," [Minutes from a Meeting of Senior Management at n.c. Komenium], 6 July 1989, in NA, "Komenium," Box 15.

⁴³ See "Porada č. 10 - 6.11.1989," [Meeting No. 10], in NA, "Komenium," Box 15.

⁴⁴ See "Příkaz ředitele – Organizační a jednací řád vnitropodnikových porad," [Director's Order – Organisational and Agenda Regulations of the Internal Managerial Meetings], November 1989. In NA, "Komenium," Box 15.

that “completely new titles and types of school equipment will need to be included, ... particularly those that aged both physically as well as morally”.⁴⁵ Among the first steps taken by the post-1989 government, which had major consequences for the supply of school aids supply, was that English, French and German were introduced to replace the compulsory teaching of Russian at all school levels. Soon after, centralised distribution of teaching aids to schools was altogether withdrawn by the government, and this was a serious blow to Komenium, which was previously the main supplier in that system. At that point, the company’s management realised that above all the company had “a need for good marketing, ... market research, search for new customers, and an emphasis on sale catalogues”.⁴⁶ Like in other institutions to emerge out of the command system, they had to shift their focus away from concentrating on the fight to obtain resources useful for success in an allocation system to concentrating on gaining customers to raise sales.

Despite various attempts at re-organisation, staff reductions (further complicated by the lack of resources to cover pay compensations), warehouse rental, and the sale of recreation facilities and furniture, as well as structural changes (i.e. inventing specialised divisions with relatively independent responsibilities for particular sections of the teaching aids market), by mid-1991 the company was already economically falling apart. A quote from the ‘Report on the State of Komenium’ of 1991 illustrates all the major issues state companies at that time faced: “The introduction of market relations between Komenium and schools and the removal of all central forms of supplying schools generated major complications for Komenium. In conformity with current legislation, Komenium was obliged to buy already planned and produced school equipment but there was no one to sell it to, as no proper financial resources were allocated to the schools for purchases.”⁴⁷ The suppliers kept supplying, while refusing to suspend deliveries contracted previously on the basis of the rather ambitious “Long-term Complex Programme of the Electronisation of Education for the

⁴⁵ “Materiál pro první poradu vedení podniku Komenium – 12.2.1990,” [Materials of the First Senior Managerial Meeting of Komenium], in NA, ‘Komenium’, Box 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Zpráva o stavu n.p. Komenium,” [Report on the State of the National Company Komenium]. The document is undated and unsigned, but its content indicates that the report is based on a financial analysis completed 30 September 1991, 1.

period of 1986–1990, with an Outlook to 1995”, which was introduced already in 1985.⁴⁸

At the same time, schools continuously abandoned Komenium and turned to other suppliers. “This way the current market in school equipment and supplies to a large extent fell apart. Schools are not experienced enough to seek alternative resources of financing, ... the schools lacked legal subjectivity (in order to behave as economically independent subjects on the market...) and their management was unstable during a time when new directors were being appointed. ... Komenium’s debts have grown to the extent that today it is no longer possible to pay them back just on the basis of the company’s own entrepreneurial activities. The interest on these debts continues to grow, exceeding profits, and this way the debts are increasing month by month which further complicates the company’s starting position for the anticipated privatisation.”⁴⁹ The warehouses were packed with redundant items. A report on the ‘division of printed matter’ following a visit to the warehouse in Brno suggests that the health and safety of its employees is in danger. One of the two buildings was rented out in order to generate extra income, and all stock was relocated to the remaining building. Consequently, “all the shelves are filled up to the ceiling, the pallets are placed among them with stock piled 1.2 metres high, with no passageway left, and there is no other way of reaching the shelves but by climbing over the piles on the pallets.”⁵⁰ Although the company continued to reduce the prices of their ‘commodity’ by as much as 80% of the original price, this did not lead to any significant decrease in the amount of accumulated stock or increase in profits. Thus, for example, a load of IT equipment that was originally bought for 9 900 000 CSK was sold to schools for 1 600 000.⁵¹

⁴⁸ “Dlouhodobý komplexní program elektronizace ve výchově a vzdělávání v oblasti školství pro léta 1986–1990 s výhledem do roku 1995.”; this programme was prepared jointly by the Czech and Slovak Ministries of Education and confirmed by Governmental Decree No. 360/85 in December 1985. Although it could be argued that the designers of what was essentially a ten-year plan for the educational system had no way of predicting the socio-political turnover of 1989, the idea of planning the development of information technologies (largely based on assumed supplies from domestic production!) for ten years to come seems even more ambitious and unrealistic.

⁴⁹ “Zpráva o stavu n.p. Komenium,” in NA, “Komenium,” Box 16, 1.

⁵⁰ “Dopis řediteli – za divizi tištěných pomůcek. 30.8. 1991,” [Letter to the Director – on Behalf of the Division of Printed Aids], in NA, “Komenium,” Box 16.

⁵¹ “Zpráva o stavu...,” 4.

The company's records refer to the accumulation of stock as 'catastrophic'; by 1991, the company had unsaleable goods worth 37 million CSK, 30 million CSK worth of goods that were most probably saleable but not without difficulties, 15 million worth of supplies had to be written off, while the value of the possibly saleable stock was just 40 million.⁵² Unsaleable items included, for example, titles on Russian and Soviet culture, and even a large amount of obsolete IT equipment. Most of the meeting minutes refer to practical issues, such as the introduction of market relations and the dissolution of the central allocation and distribution system, the rise in interest rates from 6% to 22%, the increase in rents and other expenses, and so on, in order to explain the failure of the company. Nonetheless, in one of his reports, the sales deputy noted that "the company ended up in a deep crisis owing to the complete absence of economic tools in its business department, which means that nobody reacted promptly to the changing influences and environment ... Contracts were prepared in an superficial and amateurish way and were not cancelled on time."⁵³ References to contracted supplies of items that were clearly unsaleable could still be found in the company records as late as mid-1991. The minutes from a meeting held in January 1991 state that the company was verbally informed that the Ministry of Education had come to a decision to put the company into liquidation or bankruptcy.⁵⁴

The story of the final stages of *Československý spisovatel* can be partly reconstructed from archival records too.⁵⁵ The house had been undergoing a number of re-organisational procedures since the mid-1980s, including staff reductions, but even in the late 1980s it still employed around 200 people.⁵⁶ The story of the privatisation and

⁵² See "Zápis z porady – 24. 7. 1991," [Minutes from a Meeting – 24. 7. 1991], in NA, "Komenium," Box 16.

⁵³ "Materiál pro ředitele podniku. 26.6.1991," [Materials for the Company's Director], in NA, "Komenium," Box 16.

⁵⁴ "Porada - 11.1.1993," in NA, "Komenium," Box 16.

⁵⁵ The summary of privatisation of *Československý spisovatel* is based on un-catalogued and unprocessed documents housed in the internal archive of Nadace Český literární fond [Czech Literary Fund Foundation] and a set of three interviews with Ing. Antonín Neumann, the Deputy Director of the Foundation conducted in December 2007, March and July 2008. The ČLF archive files include copies of correspondence between ČLF and ČS, meeting minutes, court decrees, drafts of proposals and proposals for privatisation as well as summaries of events compiled by the ČLF administrators.

⁵⁶ *Československý spisovatel* (ČS) was established in 1949 following the forced nationalisation of several private publishing companies, including Máj, ELK

consequent liquidation of this publishing house is closely linked to the Český literární fond (ČLF – Czech Literary Foundation) – its institutional guarantor, which was originally run by the Ministry of Culture. In this sense Československý spisovatel was not directly a state institution but was formally ‘owned’ by the ČLF. In 1990, the new management of ČLF, which at that time was still Československý spisovatel’s chief governing body, backed the continuation of its editorial focus on original Czech literature, as the ČLF’s representatives were convinced that most of the hundreds of newly emerging private publishers were going to largely ignore or at least give secondary attention to domestic literary production. Like other centrally operated publishing companies, Československý spisovatel had to struggle with an unwieldy managerial structure, excess staff, too many publishing series (initiated under the previous regime), and relatively large print runs. Since 1990, the ČLF continued to encourage the reconstruction of the house’s managerial structure, further reduced its staff, and was lending it increasing sums of money year by year.

Nonetheless, the house’s directors and editors-in-chief were frequently dismissed and replaced with new people, a number of highly qualified editors left the house, and key contemporary fiction writers previously affiliated with the house turned to private publishers to publish their work, all of which seems to suggest that relations between the ČLF and Československý spisovatel were not very good. Correspondence between the house’s directors and the ČLF illustrate the gradual decline of the house, which was also being discussed in the media. In their letters to the ČLF, the directors of the house were constantly asking for a suspension of payments on their outstanding debts because they lacked sufficient profits. There was also the extra burden of an outstanding debt owed to it by the former book wholesaler Knižní velkoobchod. In a letter of February 1991, for instance, the director at that time Miloš Pohorský requested another deferral of payment on an outstanding debt from 1990 (equal to 6.5 million Czech Crowns) and

[European Literary Club] and Fr. Borový. Following several years of confusion over how to define the economic subjectivity of the newly established state publishers, the ČS was defined as an ‘operational facility’ (účelové zařízení) or the Union of Czechoslovak Writers in 1952. In 1971, along with the reorganisation of the Ministry of Culture, the house and all its estate and assets (including the *Národní 9* building where the editorial offices were located) were legally transferred under the institution Český literární fond (ČLF).

stressed that because of its secondary insolvency Knižní velkoobchod owed Československý spisovatel more than eleven million Crowns.⁵⁷ He closed the letter with a request for an additional loan of 300 000. Each of the many subsequent directors in their letters reiterated these requests to defer debt and loan payments. According to the correspondence, a variety of measures was taken beyond staff reduction. These included accelerating the distribution of new titles, selling previously released titles at a lower price, and writing off the unsaleable books.

Like many other formerly centrally controlled houses, Československý spisovatel was gradually becoming trapped in pressures from a growing stock of unsaleable books, dead assets (including the big debt from Knižní velkoobchod), and rising financial obligations towards the ČLF. The house's adaptation to market behaviour was also apparently an issue; for example, in a letter from February 1991, the director of the ČLF 'regretfully' noted that the house had "again failed to make use of the adjacent building's shop windows which have been completely empty to date", and he added that "in today's conditions one has to be slightly more active". One documents titled 'The Development of the Obligation' presents a summary of key events connected with the house's economic performance during 1991–1998 and refers to issues like the failure of Československý spisovatel's management to sell some original art work in its possession at a profit, occasional modest improvements to business commitments, a serious personnel crisis, the 'incompetent' way in which a warehouse and recreational building were sold by the company, a loss-incurring contract that it had signed with an advertising agency, and an 'overall catastrophic year'.

According to Ivo Šmoldas, a poet and former editor of Československý spisovatel, who served as its first deputy director of finance after 1989, one of the heaviest burdens on the house which added to its economic decline was the system it inherited of paying privileged authors' honoraria regardless of how well a title sold. In an attempt to pay off the 'literary debt' by releasing previously banned titles, this system continued to operate to some extent in the immediate 'post-revolutionary' period; only the pool of names changed. "Not everything was selling

⁵⁷ Just to illustrate the scale of these financial obligations, it is worth noting that the average price of a hardback fiction book was in the range of 40 to 50 Czechoslovak Crowns and the official average annual income was 39,432 in 1990. See "Table 2: Book prices and average wages 1960s–2000s" in the next chapter.

but the piles of stock were growing”, he noted. “At first the still state-run wholesale company was buying everything but paying for nothing, and later on it was stripped of its assets.” Consequently, the house began to sell books through new distribution companies (very few of which were actually trustworthy) or directly to booksellers (which was a similar case). “In several months”, Šmoldas noted, “we were in possession of just three things – an overloaded warehouse, irredeemable debts, and outstanding obligations to the ČLF. To force a publishing house used to operating in a certain way into adapting to the market wilderness was difficult and given the above – noted burden it was de facto impossible.”⁵⁸

Among the key turning points that further undermined the house's chances for survival was a loss of the premises it occupied at Národní 9, a building in the centre of Prague, which was restituted to its original owners' family, and it also lost other real estate and assets in Brno, and in 1994 it ultimately had to relocate its head office.⁵⁹ That same year, the ČLF was transformed into the Nadace Český literární fond (NČLF – the Czech Literary Fund Foundation), an independent and private foundation. The new foundation assumed possession of all the property, assets, and commitments of its predecessor, the ČLF, including control over Československý spisovatel.⁶⁰ After some delay, in 1994 the publisher was registered as a corporation called ‘Český spisovatel’, with the NČLF as its only shareholder. But none of these institutional changes ultimately helped save the house.

⁵⁸ From an on-line interview with Ivo Šmoldas conducted in November 2008.

⁵⁹ This building – often referred to as a symbol of modern Czech publishing history – was rebuilt in an impressive Art Nouveau style in 1906 by the architect Osvald Polívka in order to accommodate a bookstore and later on an exhibition hall, and a publishing company of the legendary publisher František Topič (1858–1941). It had been owned since 1936 by the politician and publisher of the newspaper *Lidové noviny*, Jaroslav Stránský, and that year another leading inter-war publisher František Borový (1874–1936) moved his company into this building. Československý spisovatel was located in this building from the time of its establishment in 1949. See Aleš Zach, *Stopami pražských nakladatelských domů: Procházka mizějící paměti českých kulturních dějin* [In the Footsteps of Prague Publishing Houses: A Walk through the Vanishing Memory of Czech Cultural History], (Prague: Thyrsus, 1996).

⁶⁰ The ČLF Foundation's current mission is to support non-commercial projects in the arts, journalism, and sciences in the form of grant, stipends and rewards. For example, in 2005, the Foundation supported a variety of non-profit cultural periodicals with a total sum of over 3 million Czech Crowns, and multicultural projects with a sum of one million. See “Historie a činnost NČLF,” [History and Activities of the ČLF Foundation], <http://www.ncfl.cz/stranky/cinnost.htm> (accessed 21 November 2008).

Media coverage of the story of Československý spisovatel adopted the discourse of chaos and disaster, and reflections of this discourse can also be found in the archival documents and testimony from witnesses. In a 1996 text titled “The Publishing House Český spisovatel Goes on Sale,” Dan Anýž noted that the relatively good standing of the trademark was perhaps the only asset that the economically ruined company had to offer to a potential buyer.⁶¹ Anýž quoted then director Václav Vondráček, who considered the “editorial mistakes and personnel difficulties” to be the key issues behind the current situation, and also noted that further financial difficulties resulted from the fact that a major sum of money had to be spent on compensation paid to dismissed employees. Vondráček admitted that mistakes were made in the selection, size of print runs, and timing of the release of a number of titles, particularly in the case of popular fiction. The house erroneously saw these as a promising source of profit, although more active private publishers had already occupied that part of the market. Consequently, many of these books ended up in warehouses. Anýž cites Vondráček’s view that, despite all this, the NČLF could have been more patient and delayed the company’s sale, because at the time of the sale the company was preparing several projects, including high school textbooks, which – he was convinced – would have brought the expected commercial success.

A year later, Anýž published an article, the title of which announced that the fate of the house was being sealed forever.⁶² Following the NČLF’s unsuccessful attempt to sell Český spisovatel – not a single bid was submitted – the company went into liquidation. He summed up the glorious, interwar past of the house’s predecessor, a publishing house called František Borový, and its former reputation as a “display case of official, or at least tolerated, creative writing” during the forty years of communist rule, and he reiterated the main editorial and managerial shortcomings the house had suffered from since 1989. To illustrate, he quoted Michal Viewegh, one of the bestselling fiction writers of the post-1989 period, whose novels used to be published by this publisher, and who even worked as an editor in the early 1990s. Viewegh said that he “got tired of ... making money for Československý spisovatel” and yet having “to beg for honoraria.” Anýž also refers to one of

⁶¹ Daniel Anýž, “Nakladatelství Český spisovatel je na prodej,” *Mladá fronta Dnes* 7/269 (1996): 18.

⁶² Daniel Anýž, “Nad Českým spisovatelem se navždy zavírá voda,” *Mladá fronta Dnes* 8/280 (1997): 18.

the house's ambitious editorial projects (*Česká knižnice*) which was to publish up to sixty titles a year, and ended up releasing just two of them during the first half of the first year. After the company was liquidated some of these editorial projects were taken over by other, more successful, new, private publishers, such as *Lidové noviny*.

It could be argued – and a representative of ČLF agreed that the kind of institutional setting that Československý spisovatel represented was simply unable to survive in the new market conditions, and not just for the reasons indicated above. Documents housed in the ČLF archive provide evidence in support of this argument. They also illustrate the continuing disintegration of the house, including its debt to ČLF, which by 1995 was already more than eight million Crowns, and the difficulties funding the house's key editorial projects, ongoing personnel crises, the unprofitable sale of assets (art work, stock, warehouses), and the unsuccessful attempt to sell the company. Consequently, the ČLF finally made the decision to liquidate the house in 1997. But the legal disputes over the house's outstanding debts and its shares continued through the early 2000s. The court order to withdraw the company Český spisovatel from the Business Register is dated as late as 25 July 2007. In other words, rather than the pressures of the (external) economic transition as such, it was chiefly the continuity of the (internal) managerial style and institutional setting that led to the gradual collapse of state companies unable to compete in the privatised market.

Most of these privatisation stories were covered heavily in the media, and cases involving publishing or publishing houses figured regularly on the agenda of government meetings. Yet access to reliable information on these matters has been limited. Testimony provided by witnesses and by the main actors in individual cases is often contradictory, and so are the versions of the story presented in the media. The administrative archives of many of the publishing houses involved in these affairs are either inaccessible or no longer exist, and even the often fragmentary information that was available was easy to manipulate. Even the publishers themselves in interviews provided only fragmentary and conflicting information.⁶³ Not even the *Knihkupec*

⁶³ One Prague journalist, who had been systematically monitoring the area of publishing since the early 1990s, tried to sum up the often hopeless efforts to tell the story of books in the transition period. In an informal meeting with myself in 2000 he noted that, despite his exhaustive investigative efforts to understand publishing trends, publishers were telling him what they liked or what they considered to be suitable for their own publicity.

a nakladatel (Booksellers and Publishers) – the only professional periodical in the field until 2002 – expressed more optimistic views about the possibility of a ‘qualified evaluation’ of the changes in the book market. By 2000 its editors were arguing that it was ‘too soon’ to make any competent conclusions about the local book scene, for the evidence and ‘the proper documents’ were difficult to get hold of. In addition, as it happened, “the participants of particular cases have been struck by a sudden loss of memory”.⁶⁴ Although some observers and participants in the Czech book scene would argue that there is no way of putting together a reliable picture of publishing in the early transition era, some basic trends can be identified.

What may seem obvious now, but was by no means so in the early 1990s, is that the purely economic expectations defined before privatisation were misleading, at least in the socio-cultural context of the transition period. Notions of transparency and efficiency promised as a direct consequence of privatisation may have served as a powerful and appealing argument in support of transitional liberal radicalism. But as the actual practices of the decentralisation of book production and bookselling have shown, these notions never fully corresponded to the everyday reality of publishing in the transition period. The state – despite its proclaimed leading role in the privatisation process – not only had no clearly defined (cultural) policy but it also lacked the human and financial resources to manage a process this demanding and complex.⁶⁵ Without a basic policy or even an idea about future development, the former state-run cultural enterprises were not given the support (legal, institutional, know-how, etc.) they needed in order to survive in the new conditions.

What was missing was a consensus on how to define the role of former state-run enterprises once they had lost their dominant position on the market. The stone-wall publishing elephants were simply expelled from their protective sanctuary and exposed to pressures from unknown forces and the ‘invisible hands of the market’. However,

⁶⁴ *Knihkupec a nakladatel* V (XIX)/3 (2000): 10.

⁶⁵ Although this might sound anecdotal, as late as the winter of 2005 a key representative of the Union of Czech Publishers and Booksellers noted in an informal discussion that the Book Department of the Ministry of Culture essentially consisted of two full-time employees, and that both of them were on maternity leave. They were replaced by a couple of part-timers whose decision-making power and executive authority were close to zero. All of the department’s activities would thus be significantly limited until the two clerks returned to work.

the state's tendency to essentially withdraw its responsibility for cultural matters did not go unnoticed. Some criticism of this was inspired by the high expectations traditionally imposed locally on the role of the state in public issues, and it was not just more central funding that critical voices were calling for. One of the first prominent personalities to call openly for state intervention as early as 1991 was the former dissident writer and essayist Ludvík Vaculík. Although he was primarily concerned about the censorship of child pornography, it is hard not to see a bit of historical irony in the fact that it was an author formerly banned by the state who was among the first to call for the state to resume its prohibitive role.

Having withdrawn from its controlling and subsidising role after 1989, the state was nonetheless still expected to retain its key position in several book-related areas, including the central coordination of information on books in print and copyright legislation. Neither of these expectations was fully met. It was the Union of Czech Booksellers and Publishers, with financial support from the European Union's PHARE programme, that released the first volume of *Books in Print* in 1996. And it was not until 1996, that more substantially revised copyright legislation was passed by Parliament. Given the amount of time needed to put the new legal instruments of coordination and regulation in place, combined with the well-established local 'culture' of bypassing the authorities, it is not surprising that the word 'chaos' has frequently been used to describe the current state of the book scene. The state was also called on to assume its responsibility for supporting selected editorial projects that have wider cultural and educational, and impact, but little chance of becoming bestsellers.⁶⁶ Despite attempts to at least financially assist in some isolated cases, the post-totalitarian state de facto gave up on designing any consistent policy of supporting cultural production and reception in the transition period, and that also applied to books and publishing. The privatisation of the vast majority of the state-owned publishing houses essentially failed to

⁶⁶ A scheme of financial support through grants for publishing was introduced in 1994. The Ministry of Culture distributed over 1 million CSK (an equivalent of approx. 30 000 USD at that time) to support those projects labelled by a specially appointed committee as 'highly valuable'. State subsidies were also allocated to several literary journals whose limited readership could not guarantee their survival on the increasingly competitive print-media market. Although the sum of support has increased several times over the years since 1994, the scheme has been criticised in the media.

prevent their collapse. It is a question to what extent it was the lack of experience of the newly appointed administration in the relevant state offices, the limited funds available in the state budget, or simply the lack of concern for cultural matters on the part of the predominantly right-wing post-1989 governments that contributed to the failure of the state to substantially facilitate the transition of cultural institutions to the market environment.

If we accept the assumption that the way in which socio-cultural processes are represented is an inherent part of the social practices that constitute those processes in the first place, the question of media representation of the immediate post-November book-related affairs and stories randomly referred to in this account deserves some more attention here, too. It would be fair to expect that despite the incapability of the former state-controlled publishers to adapt to the new market environment, the arrival of freedom, diversity, and choice and the consequent departure of the 'censor' are things that the media would have enthusiastically celebrated and glorified, or at least reflected on mainly in positive terms. The 'revolutionary' media generally abandoned their prior discourse boasting of life in a 'cultural paradise', where books, galleries, and cinemas were 'in the hands of the people', and the communist past was now newly framed as a period of oppression, imposed upon the local community by the totalitarian regime. Nevertheless, the discourses applied in media to 'liberated' books – especially in the period just after November 1989 – in sum referred to horror, chaos, and disaster. It could be safely argued that the discourse of complaint seems to be part of the profession's folklore worldwide, be it among publishers or booksellers, and most remarks are about the decline of readers' tastes and the fall in profits, despite the millions of printed pages in bookshops and at the book fair exhibitors' stands. In the specific Czech case, however, the 'horrors of book liberation' produced by the post-1989 media can also be seen as part of the above-noted tradition of a discourse centred on the power of the (Czech) book accompanied by concerns over its ability to support the social and cultural meanings it had been assigned.

However, before looking at how the media represented the story of books after 1989, it would be useful to first make a few general remarks about the character of the local post-revolutionary media. First, though it is perhaps a banal point, one of the main characteristics of a medialised text is its intrinsic need to attract audiences, and under this imperative it tends to highlight the actual, current, and scandalous aspects of

the events and stories presented in the text. Such a text is expected to formulate these aspects in a discourse that is acceptable and attractive to a wide range of potential audiences. Secondly, during the first post-1989 decade, scholarly analyses – both local and international – of the development of the public sphere and civil society in the former Soviet bloc tended to devote an inadequate amount of attention to the role of the media. And the relative lack of adequate analytical attention paid to this area of public communication may partly be responsible for the fact that media were often assigned an almost supernatural power and, as a result, were held responsible for the state of ‘transitional’ society. The privatised and commercialised media in the country have generally been regarded as having ‘a particularly devastating’, ‘catastrophic’, and ‘irreversibly negative’ impact on the public, especially on children and youth, primarily owing to the absence of sufficient legal regulations governing media operations. Television and daily newspapers especially are seen as playing “a great role in the unsatisfactory state of our politics and its public perception, ... they adopted the role of an absolute arbitrator of everything and by means of their opportunistic criticism and – often celebratory – campaigns tend to misinform citizens”.⁶⁷ One account of the Czech media scene, written by a non-Czech author, even states that while “the rebuilding of open channels of public information began with the Velvet Revolution”, in some instances, “post-communist journalism was every bit as opinionated as communist journalism has been”.⁶⁸ Alternative views in the local media, claiming, for example, that “the content of Czech newspapers is unbeatably richer, they are larger and overall better than in the past”⁶⁹, are somewhat overshadowed by the volume of radically and flatly negative opinions.

One issue that has attracted a fair amount of public attention, at least since March 1990, when an amendment to press legislation was made to allow private ownership of the print media, is the presence of foreign capital in Czech newspapers. The amount of foreign investment in Czech newspapers may be one of the key features that distinguish the

⁶⁷ P. Machonin (2005), 235.

⁶⁸ C. Sklanik-Leff (1998), 112–113. For an account of the post-communist media scene, see, for example, David L. Paletz, Karol Jakubowicz, and Pavao Novosel, eds., *Glasnost and After: Media and Change in Central and Eastern Europe* (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 1995).

⁶⁹ I. Možný (2002), 186.

transformation of the print media from that of book publishing. Unlike publishing companies, the majority of the previously state-run print media companies have been bought by international investors, so that eighty percent of the country's (both national and provincial) periodicals have been in the hands of (most often) German (and to a lesser extent Swiss) investors since the mid-1990s. Lenka Waschková-Císařová, one of the few scholars dealing with the issues of the deregulation, privatisation, and consequent concentration of ownership of the Czech print media, has noted that the local academic community missed a historical opportunity to systematically monitor these unique processes, or at least to collect basic data for further analysis.⁷⁰ As in the case of the book transition, all a researcher can do ten years later is to reconstruct the stories of individual periodicals from oral history and rumour. The lack of transparency and the often deliberate obscurity surrounding the recent histories of Czech periodicals means that it is not just hard to study their ownership history but it is often impossible to identify the subjects that actually own them.

A consequence of the lack of a systematic professional analysis of the local media scene is that a highly controversial form of discourse has marked the debates on the so-called German colonisation of the Czech press. One example is a typically titled booklet *The End of the Czech Press?* (which has also been referred to in academic accounts of related topics).⁷¹ The central argument of this text is that the concentration and monopolisation of press ownership in German hands is a major threat to the development of democratic and independent media in the country, and this idea is complemented by the following portrait: "Our daily press – except for a few titles – is no longer *Czech* and *independent* ... Having lost Czech ownership of the media, we have also lost the opportunity to influence public opinion in all spheres of

⁷⁰ Lenka Waschková-Císařová, "Koncentrace vlastnictví českého lokálního a regionálního tisku: příčiny a důsledky," [The Concentration of Ownership of the Czech Local and Regional Press: Causes and Implications], presented at the conference "Media Competencies in the Information Society", held on 12–13 April 2007 at Smolenice Castle in Slovakia.

⁷¹ Bořivoj Čelovský, "Konec českého tisku," [The End of the Czech Press], Second Expanded Edition. (Senov u Ostravy: Tilia, 2002). For references to this book, see Svatava Navrátilová, "Mediální sféra české společnosti po roce 1989: normativní a axiologické aspekty," [The Media Sphere of Czech Society after 1989: Normative and Axiological Aspects], *Media a realita* [Media and Reality], ed. Jaromír Volek and Pavla Binková (Brno: FSS MU, 2004), 255–282; and L. Waschková-Císařová (2007).

social life, and consequently our own destiny”.⁷² What is missing from this picture, however, is at least a basic analysis of how ‘German interests’ have specifically been reflected in the choice of stories produced by the ‘colonised media’ and the discourse that dominates them, the management style of these media, their impact on readership and on journalists, and, more generally, the definition of their role in the transitional media scene.⁷³ Media analyst, Waschková-Císařová noted that while ownership of the local print media has become concentrated, and to some extent the variety of locally available sources of information has been reduced, foreign investment, at least in the early stages, also significantly helped to modernise editorial offices and their equipment, brought them access to the most advanced information technology, and resulted in the complete refurbishing of printing facilities.⁷⁴

It might be worth citing some figures to round out this brief look at the local print media, as it is particularly this part of the production of printed matter that is often set against book production in more general terms. As in the case of book publishing, in the first decade after the revolution the Czech Statistical Office recorded a rapid increase in

⁷² Quoted in B. Čelovský (2002), 15, (my italics).

⁷³ The author, however, does trace some of the changes in ownership of *Lidové noviny* and the rather confusing privatisation story of the largest national newspaper *MF Dnes*. A former samizdat periodical, with a long pre-1948 tradition, from 1996 *Lidové noviny* was co-owned by Springer Verlag (known for its ongoing conflicts with left-wing German intellectuals and politicians), and four years later it was sold to Swiss Ringier and then re-sold to the ‘pro-Sudeten’ company (to use the author’s adjective) Reinisch-Bergische Druckerei und Verlagsgesellschaft (RBVG) of Düsseldorf shortly after. A group of editors and journalists from the newspaper *Mladá fronta* – run until 1989 by the Socialist Union of Youth (SSM), the national umbrella youth organisation of the Communist Party – set up the shareholder company MaF, a.s. This company began to publish the daily *Mladá fronta Dnes* in the summer of 1990 and the new publishing enterprise retained all the original assets of *Mladá fronta*, including subscriptions and distribution, despite the fact that all the property of the former SSM, including the original daily *Mladá fronta*, was formally transferred to the state-run Fund of Children and Youth in 1991. About half of the shares, whose value was growing rapidly, were sold to Robert Hersant, the publisher of *Le Figaro*, in 1992 and he re-sold his shares to the above noted RBVG of Düsseldorf in 1994 for over one billion Czech Crowns, the equivalent of approximately 33 million USD at that time.

⁷⁴ As Waschková-Císařová also noted, it is difficult to imagine today how different local papers would or could be now if German capital had not intervened in their development. Similarly, it is difficult to trace differences between on the one hand the foreign-owned media and on the other hand the few locally owned papers, like the daily *Právo* – which was formerly the leading communist broadsheet *Rudé právo* – which has been struggling with financial difficulties in recent years. See L. Waschková-Císařová (2007).

the number of daily newspapers published (from 31 to 103) and in the total number of periodicals (from 772 to 3 894).⁷⁵ Waschková-Císařová claims that these official records are highly unreliable, since, for example, out of approximately 2000 regional and local periodicals registered with the Ministry of Culture in 2006 she was able to trace office addresses for only 146 of them. But the print media scene has nonetheless changed considerably since November 1989, and so has the size and appearance of the average newspaper. For example, in late 1989, one issue of the newspaper *Mladá Fronta* was eight pages in length, of which 1.5 pages were reserved for advertisements. By 2002 the same newspaper, which shortly after the revolution was renamed *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, was around 56 pages in length and included 21 pages of advertising, and its price had multiplied. Glossy magazines printed on high-quality paper were virtually non-existent before 1989, and the daily newspapers were published exclusively in black-and-white print. Like with book publishing, these changes in the quantity and in the appearance of periodicals, and the multiplication of topics and perspectives, resulted in an increased number of printed texts available to local readers. It is also worth noting that, at least during the early 1990s, very high social expectations were being placed on the local media, and were articulated almost in the terms of the classical liberal theory of Adam Smith, John Locke, and John Stuart Mill. The media were expected to democratise and liberate society and to contribute to the establishment of civil society. The concepts of freedom of speech and other human rights may have been prostituted and devalued since then, but at the time that discourse had a powerful impact on the process of redefining society and how it operates.

The privatisation of the print media, which was followed by a significant increase in the number of available texts, printed on ever more aggressively colourful pages, soon created a highly competitive environment in the media market. Managers of newly privatised periodicals mastered the game of increasing sales figures by printing attractive, sensational, and preferably scandalous stories. As any newspaper or magazine reader in the Czech lands must have noted, and as media analysts have confirmed, one of the specific features of the Czech media scene of the 1990s was its tendency to “blur the difference between

⁷⁵ *Statistická ročenka České a Slovenské federativní republiky* (Prague: Federální statistický úřad, 1990); *Statistická ročenka České republiky* (Prague: ČSÚ, 2000).

serious media and tabloids”.⁷⁶ However, according to opinion polls, even in the mid-1990s the local media enjoyed a high level of trust from the population, right alongside the President and the government.⁷⁷ Despite the level of public trust and the obvious diversification of print-media content, there has been an obvious attempt to portray the print media as corrupt and essentially spoiled. Even social analysts like Ivo Možný, who otherwise endorsed a more optimistic picture of transitional society and its media, noted that it failed to produce what could generally be called a ‘good quality paper’. He attributed the absence of any newspapers comparable to, say, *The Guardian* or *The Independent* to the non-existence of a “self-confident upper middle class”, who need and would buy and read printed matter to get an orientation in “what is really important in terms of the true attributes of the quality of life”.⁷⁸

The post-1989 representation of the book cannot, therefore, be properly examined in isolation from the main developmental trends in the print media after 1989. Some of the texts published on books after November 1989 actually emerged out of a genuine concern for the future of the ‘Czech book’ and consequently Czech culture as such. While this may sound naïve from a critical cultural-theory perspective, under these specific ‘revolutionary’ circumstances the processes of encoding and decoding the media message (here the message about books) seems to have converged in a unique but short-lived consensus shared by both the message producers and their audiences. In Havel’s terms, “after decades of lying”, newspapers finally endeavoured to “tell the truth”, and the readers wanted to read about it. An important part of this agenda was an interest in the rediscovered notion of a ‘national culture’, which had been downplayed in the preceding decades of promoting ‘socialist’ and ‘working class’ culture. At the same time, already in the last months of 1989, the local papers were no longer able to ignore entirely the growing pressure they were under to present stories that would attract audiences and increase sales. And initially the affairs and stories of the early post-revolutionary period provided enough ‘material’ to combine these two seemingly contradictory tendencies of credibility and appeal. The somewhat over-dramatised representation of books then also partially resulted from this happy marriage of a true,

⁷⁶ S. Navrátilová (2004), 257.

⁷⁷ S. Navrátilová (2004), 267.

⁷⁸ I. Možný (2002), 186.

perhaps somewhat obsessive, but historically grounded, interest in books – regarded as representative of ‘national culture’ – and the need to follow the imperative of attractiveness.

Reading Czech periodicals in the first months after November 1989, one could easily have come to the conclusion that the breakdown of the centrally controlled system was the worst tragedy that could have ever befallen the local book world. Even without any in-depth content analysis of the body of texts on ‘revolutionary’ books in local periodicals, the nature of the stories is clear, and in some cases the headlines alone were revealing.⁷⁹ Readers of local newspapers were met with headlines bearing ominous or nationalistic messages (“A Farewell to Books”, “A National Shame”), predicting doom or eliciting outrage (“Will We Still Be Able to Afford to Buy Books At All?”, “It’s a Scandal!”), or were overtly apocalyptic in tone (“Will the Book Survive the Year 1992?”). Once the headline was just the simple but alarming question “Why?”. Publishers appearing in the media and a few academics that contributed to the public debate followed similar discursive principles. In an article titled “Report on the Book Collapse”, for example, one prominent publisher, Vladimír Pistorius, complained about the high production costs in publishing, the deterioration of the traditional distribution network, a growing stock of unsaleable books, and the passive attitude of the Czech government.⁸⁰ Even literary scholars, who were trying to monitor the development of the local book scene in the media, painted a somewhat gloomy picture. For example, Pavel Janáček questioned whether it would ever be possible to establish any order in the book market and noted that “publishers (but not all of them) consider the current situation as leading towards a heart attack”.⁸¹ He saw some hope, however, in the establishment of a new periodical, *Labyrint*, devoted to issues of cultural management and production.⁸² A few

⁷⁹ The following account of the representation of texts immediately after the revolution is based on a corpus of 54 texts published in Czech dailies, journals, and magazines between November 1989 and January 1992, most of them from my own archives, and partly on clippings collected in the Municipality Library in Prague.

⁸⁰ Vladimír Pistorius, “Zpráva o knižním kolapsu,” [Report on the Book Collapse], *Tvar* 2/1 (1991): 1, 4.

⁸¹ Pavel Janáček, “Podaří se vnést řád do knižního trhu?” [Can Order Be Introduced into the Book Market?], *Lidové noviny* 4/161 (13 July 1991): 4.

⁸² Although *Labyrint Revue* – originally a modest by-weekly initiated and published by an enthusiast, Joachim Dvořák – did not introduce order into the market, it nonetheless grew into a kind of thematic yearbook with a high quality design, targeting intellectual readers with texts on current social and cultural theory (of both local and

accounts of the Czech book transition that appeared in international academic journals shortly after November also contained visions of destruction. For example, Glasgow-based literary scholar Igor Hájek referred to the “*collapse* of the book market” (my italics), which “came earlier than anyone could have expected”,⁸³ and represented the transformation of the world of books and its reception predominantly in the terms of ‘crisis’ and ‘collapse’, while emphasising its ‘unexpected’ and ‘sudden’ nature. The crisis was not described as the end of the old system and the beginning of a new era of quality, but rather as the decline, the deterioration, and even ‘the end’ of the Czech book as such, often defined in strictly national terms.

No matter how much the spheres of book and cultural production generally resist measurement and estimation, the images of ‘the end of the book’ that spread through the local media seem almost entirely contradicted by the above-cited statistical figures on the changes in book production in the first decade of the 1990s. According to these indicators, for example, representatives of the Union of Czech Booksellers and Publishers referred on their website to “the incredibly positive impact” that “the change of political climate after 1989” had had on the expansion of publishing activities in the country. They also concluded that “book production was the first area of culture that underwent a complex transformation in the changed socio-economic conditions”.⁸⁴ Also, the Union’s website drew attention to the gap between the general representation and actual state of the book scene and pointed out that “despite the objective problems and subjective lamentations of the majority of the Czech book market’s protagonists,

foreign origin) and work from the contemporary world and domestic literature. Dvořák also runs a small but active publishing house under the same name. Again, quite typically, in the editorial he wrote for a recent issue of *Labyrint Revue*, Dvořák noted that when, sixteen years ago, he published a periodical of just a couple of pages providing information about books, he “had no idea what and how it all operates, how to do a magazine or newspaper, how to write an objective review and what a sale strategy is really about. I knew nothing, nobody, and had no money. All I had was patience, a need not to be employed in some kind of established editorial office, and a desire to do something on my own”. See Joachim Dvořák, “Editorial,” *Labyrint Revue* 19–20 (2007), <http://www.labyrint.net/labyrint-revue-19-20.htm> (accessed 21 June 2007).

⁸³ Igor Hájek, “Czech Culture in the Cauldron,” *Europe Asia Studies* 46/1 (1994): 129.

⁸⁴ Jaroslav Císař, “Knižní obor v českých zemích po 2. světové válce,” [The Book Business in the Czech Lands after the Second World War], <http://www.sckn.cz> (accessed 20 April 2005).

the available data on publishing activities in the Czech Republic confirm that buying and reading books still rank among significant cultural activities in our country [which] according to international statistics is among the top fifteen countries in the world in the total number of published books”.⁸⁵ Joachim Dvořák, himself a publisher, and editor of *Almanach Labyrint*, the directory of publishers and book-sellers, noted in 1997 that “while looking at our book market, many were expressing major insecurity and discomfort, predicted the decline, breakdown, and blight of the entire culture ... it seems, however, that these prophecies simply did not come true. With unbelievable ‘arrogance’ and contrary to the tough rules of the mighty market Czech publishers continue to turn out one book after another.”⁸⁶

It could be argued that the specific interplay between supply and demand and the rapid growth of publishing entities and their output in the Czech context was unprecedented in modern Euro-American book history. And indeed, this occurred not just in the Czech context, as an examination of book production in other post-socialist European countries in the region would reveal comparable trends in post-1989 development. The Polish book market is one of the most consistently monitored markets. The Polish book industry, which caters to a population nearly three times larger than that of the Czech Republic, underwent a massive privatisation process. While in 1989 there were 36 state-owned publishers and 48 affiliated with various cooperative, religious, and other organisations, including universities and governmental agencies, by 1993 the Polish National Library had a record of 2273 private publishers.⁸⁷ In 2005, there were approximately 20 000 publishers registered in Poland, but the 200 largest ones produced 98% of the books on the market and only 350 houses produced more than ten books a year.⁸⁸ The Polish publishing world shared some features with

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Joachim Dvořák, “Rukovět čtenáře,” [A Reader’s Manual], *Almanach Labyrint* (Prague: Labyrint, 1997), 5.

⁸⁷ Jadwiga Kolodziejska, “Five Years of Freedom in Culture in the Polish Experience,” *60th IFLA General Conference - Conference Proceedings - August 21–27, 1994*, <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla60/60-kolj.htm> (accessed 30 March 2007) in reference to *Ruch Wydawniczy w liczbach, XXXV* [Publishing Activities in Figures], (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1989).

⁸⁸ *Rynek książki w Polsce 2005* [The Book Market in Poland/2005] Instytut Książki; available at http://www.instytutksiazki.pl/buchmarkt/rynek_ksiazki_2005/szczegoly/article/rynek_ksiazki_w_polsce_2005.html?cHash=dc60f97874 (accessed 30 March 2007).

its Czech counterpart, such as the collapse of the state monopoly on publishing, a rapidly growing private sector, increasing difficulties with maintaining bibliographical records of the total production, the expansion of the genre spectrum, and the consequent overproduction of 'low-class books' by a growing number of profit-oriented publishers. But there were other features that were specific to the 'liberated' Polish book world, one of which was the strong presence of foreign investment in local book production. There was also (at least in the early 1990s) a flourishing market in pirate publications in Poland, mainly supplied from Ukraine and Lithuania. Pirate publishing took revenue away from registered publishers and deprived the state of tax revenue, but in rural, economically disadvantaged regions, it was one of the few means by which the population was able to come into contact with books. Polish analysts noted that one of the consequences of the transition was a declining interest in 'high quality' national literature and a decline in its prestige, and although there was an overall increase in reading frequency, it focused mainly on entertaining fiction and, at least according to Polish analysts, resulted in the "impoverishment of the mother tongue".⁸⁹

While the 'new' book markets in the 'other' Europe remained largely outside the attention of the local media, there were a few reports in the media on Polish books. The representation of Polish books in the media would have comforted Czech book producers and readers, as the discourse there was even more dramatic and catastrophic in tone than that on Czech transition books. "A Report on the State of the Polish Book", for example, published in 1991, referred to a survey conducted by a special committee appointed by the Association of Polish Fiction Writers, which stated that following the privatisation of publishing, the establishment of the free market, and the elimination of censorship, the number of titles published and the size of the print runs had been decreasing. It claimed that private publishers operated with a small staff, avoided paying taxes on honoraria, and were often established for purely commercial purposes – sometimes only in order to release just one profitable title. As in the Czech case, the remaining state-owned publishers had to struggle with huge debts, were unable to reduce the number of staff, and their attempt at change was often limited to recruiting a new editor-in-chief. The situation had a direct

⁸⁹ J. Kolodziejska (1994).

impact on the publishing of Polish contemporary literature, for both the new private and the old state-owned houses were afraid to take risks, and therefore avoided publishing unknown or overly demanding texts. Wholesale companies suffered from a lack of advanced technology, mail-order purchasing systems were underdeveloped owing to high postage costs, and the credit and tax systems were being set up. Sales were further complicated by weak promotion, delayed reviews, unavailable editorial plans, late or unobtainable information about newly released books, and the shortage of reprints. The distribution of bestsellers was based mainly on word-of-mouth, while many of the advertised books were never ultimately released. In all, the Report concluded, the Polish book was “in a shameful state and almost always below the European standard”.⁹⁰

Debates over the state and future of the Polish book continued well beyond the early 1990s and were marked by comparable discourse and revolved around comparable controversies to those identified in the Czech context. According to some local critics, a book market crisis had existed for years in Poland, because books were relatively expensive, and the most avid book buyers (i.e. underpaid intellectuals) could no longer afford them. But at odds with this rather bleak picture, in 2000, half of the 800 publishers at the Warsaw Book Fair – one of the largest fairs in Europe – were Polish, and Poland was the main guest at Frankfurt that year.⁹¹ Nevertheless, more empirical evidence would be needed in order for Polish book production to provide any potentially comparative data. Perhaps the most extensive project with comparative international ambitions was produced by a team co-ordinated by Peter Inkei at the Open Society Institute in Budapest in 1995–2000 and published under the title ‘The Book Sector in 2000 in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.’⁹² Although it is possible to see why the authors of the study considered this project to be “a unique source of information on the book sector” in the region, the project also reflected the difficulties related to conducting such large-scale and ambitious comparative surveys in the specific socio-cultural context of the post-communist

⁹⁰ Eva Šimůnková, “Zpráva o stavu polské knihy,” [Report on the State of Polish Book], *Literární noviny* 2/19 (1991): 12; published as a supplement of *Lidové noviny* 4 (8 May 1991).

⁹¹ Renata Putzlacher-Buchtová, “Polsko” [Poland], *Host. Měsíčník pro literaturu a čtenáře* 3 (2001), <http://www.hostbrno.cz/casopis.php?body=clanek&clanek=98357400> (accessed 25 June 2007).

⁹² The report is available at <http://www.budobs.org> (accessed 20 April 2005).

transition period. The authors openly refer to some of these complex difficulties, such as the absence of reliable statistics in many countries of the region, and the impossibility of extracting any kind of 'average' or 'typical' features out of the specific social and cultural realities of the respective countries. One of the main problems, however, lay in the project's main objective – to cover the entire region. To attain valid data and contextual information on twenty-two countries – including the current Russian Federation, which, in addition to the problem of its size, represents a highly specific social entity, defined by a variety of cultural and socio-economic systems – became a too ambitious goal. In most cases, the data were collected with the help of the OSI regional offices, which distributed simple questionnaires to the "experts and practitioners of the respective field". Nonetheless, given the exceptionally large geo-political area covered, it is a question to what extent the data came from a comparable level of expertise. As the authors of the report themselves admitted, in a number of cases it was a matter of "a good deal of guesswork", combined with estimates calculated to make up for some of the missing or obviously inconsistent figures.

The Budapest report, nonetheless, offers some unique data on a wide range of issues, including book production, production costs, sales and distribution, and especially on academic publishing and textbook markets. There is also a noteworthy section comparing particular figures on book prices to, for instance, the average salary in individual countries. The distinction between what the report refers to as 'new books' and textbooks is methodologically important, despite the fact that it is not clear whether the 'new' titles include or exclude reprints. In many of the countries of the region, textbooks represent a specific type of production and distribution, which involves publishing a relatively large number of titles in small print runs and in cheaply produced formats. Textbooks also have very specific consumption patterns, defined by a continuous demand (new generations of students and schoolchildren continue to come along), and by the recycling of copies of previous prints runs within the state school system.

A major issue, though, particularly in such an ambitious project, is the question of interpretation. The authors of the report stated that "initially, little energy was left for the analysis of the data" and that their main objective was to ask questions rather than give answers. But without figures covering a longer period, it is very difficult to analyse any trends or even project the development of particular processes. Also, some of the figures quoted in the report seem questionable.

For example, the report cites a decrease in the total number of printed 'new copies' in Bulgaria from 43 million in 1994 to 9 million in 2000, or in Hungary from 70 million to 24 million in the same period, and while these figures are perhaps possible, they are somewhat difficult to accept. These data in principle reflect the trend in decentralised book production of producing more titles (the most striking case being, perhaps, Albania, where the number of titles published increased from 365 titles in 1994 to 3010 in 2000) and smaller print runs. For example, a comparison of book production in the period between 1994 and 2000 (Table 8) indicates that in most of the 13 countries observed the number of titles went up (with the exception of Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, where dramatic growth had already occurred in the early 1990s), while the overall number of copies and the number of copies per capita (except in Albania) significantly decreased.

But some of the data cited still elicit a number of questions. Can the dramatic decrease in the number of printed copies (assuming that the data are more or less accurate) be viewed as evidence of the 'consolidation' and 'saturation' of the market, as the report suggests, or should other factors be considered, too? For example, significant differences between the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of countries must play a role here, too, and the very fact that Estonia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic ranked highest in the number of titles published per capita in 2000 is perhaps evidence of this.⁹³ A decrease in print runs would have also been influenced by the economic recession and inflation in many of the countries in the region in the second half of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the Budapest report represents a collection of data and information that is simply unavailable from any other source. It also addresses several specific issues and offers some very detailed information, such as the amount of time an 'average' person in these countries has to work in order to buy a book.⁹⁴ The data on books that the research team collected, with a great deal of effort, shed light on the

⁹³ According to the report (*Table 3: New Titles Related to the Number of Inhabitants*), 2064 titles were published per million inhabitants in Estonia, 1 789 in Slovenia, and 1026 in the Czech Republic, while, for example, 860 in Albania, 426 in Poland, 344 in Russia, and 41 in Tajikistan in 2000.

⁹⁴ Local currencies are converted to the rate of the US dollar in 2000. In Armenia, where the average person made 25 USD a month and a book cost 3.30 USD, a reader had to work 12.7 hours in order to afford a book; an Estonian worked for 5.5 hours (monthly income was 286 USD and the price of a book 9 USD), while Czechs and Hungarians had to work the least time, for 2.5 hours, to buy a book (monthly income

incredible gaps in knowledge relating to book production and reception and even to the cultural dynamics of the geo-political region itself. While the general trend towards multiplication and diversification of book production that followed the disintegration of the centrally controlled system was essentially confirmed in most of the countries under research, the report also revealed the difficulties of conducting any consistent comparative intra-regional analyses within this highly differentiated geographical area, which not only shares the legacy of totalitarianism, but is characterised by rich diversity and highly specific transition features.

in the Czech Republic was 365 USD and a book cost 5 USD; monthly income in Hungary was 207 USD and a book cost 2.96 USD). Ibid. *Table 32: Average Salaries, Average Prices.*

CHAPTER NINE

THE PAPER REVOLUTIONARIES

Along with the gradual disintegration of the dominant position of the centrally controlled publishers in the market, a boom in private, independent publishing was reported in most countries in the region, and Czech publishers were no exception to this trend. Who, though, was behind the book turnover of the late 1980s and early 1990s and how do these individuals characterise the ‘transitional’ period? To at least partly answer this question, it is necessary to take the discussion back to the issue raised above about representation and to the data and information available on these processes. One cannot but envy Robert Darnton’s attic, filled with the archives of the Société de la typographie de Neuchâtel, where he found “first-hand accounts of life in the book trade from all of its sectors and all of the cities in France”, dating back two hundreds years earlier.¹ Indeed, it is impossible not to appreciate his doubts about the representative nature of the ‘contents of one single attic’ and its capacity to fully reconstruct ‘the whole world’ of his object of study, i.e. the forbidden books in pre-revolutionary France. But for anyone dealing with the cultural dynamics of post-socialist Central Europe, even an attic of resources that could help explain the world of books in ‘revolutionary Bohemia’ twenty years ago would certainly be appreciated, as the resources for creating a fairly credible picture of the ‘transitional’ book world are rather limited.

Much of the following account is based on the information gathered from nineteen in-depth interviews conducted in the late 1990s.² They were not intended to and could not even provide a fully representative picture of the entire publishing scene in the country, but the main

¹ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-seller of Pre-revolutionary France* (London: Fontana Press/Harper Collins, 1996), 52.

² Two of my research assistants and I conducted 21 (recorded and transcribed) interviews, 19 of them with professionals involved in publishing, one with a former bookseller, and one with a representative of The Union of Czech Booksellers and Publishers. Interviews were conducted in the period between May 1999 and March 2001 in Prague and Brno. I also held numerous informal (i.e. unrecorded) discussions mainly with Prague publishers, booksellers, printers and journalists involved in the coverage of the book production in the period of 1995–2006.

purpose was to record some authentic reflections of people actually involved in the day-to-day operations of the book business in the 1990s. Their attitudes and experiences may not be typical for the book scene as a whole, but they certainly do to some extent reflect its specific socio-cultural context. The principal criterion for the selection of interviewees was their position in the local book world – they were among the most productive, stable (i.e. in business for over five years), and respected publishers, who were involved in independent publishing since its very beginnings. The majority of private publishing houses were established during the early period of 1989–1991, the youngest of the houses started in 1994. The smallest of our interviewees produced up to five titles a year, the yearly production of the biggest ones was in the range of 100 to 1000 titles.

These characteristics put further limits on the representative nature of their testimonies. A snowball sampling method was used; we knew some publishers personally, we also knew people who knew some publishers; and some of the interviewed publishers simply suggested others who might be willing to talk to us. Given the workload of the majority of these individuals, their availability also had to be considered, as did the very practical concern of location – the majority of our respondents were thus based in Prague. The interviewers asked a range of basic questions pertaining to the personal characteristics of the publisher, such as age, education, professional experience before 1989, and motivations; information about the company, including the process of its establishment, office locations, editorial profile, key authors, financial backup, promotion, and so on. Finally, we asked about the type of publications released, print runs, production time, paper and printing, copyediting and preparation of the manuscript, the availability of market information, and the tools of promotion used in their publishing practice. One of the most problematic issues was that of confidentiality. The majority of our interviewees were public figures; interviews with them and their own writings on a variety of book-related matters had already been published in the local print media on several occasions, and they had also taken part in televised discussions. Some of them were only willing to provide us with relevant information on the condition that their names would not be revealed. Thus, the anonymity of all interviewees was respected, for given the rather limited size of the local cultural community, and the nature of the market, where even just a first name and a general identifying feature, like “a small publisher specialising in esoteric literature based in South Bohemia”,

would be enough to clearly reveal the identity of the person, at least to those familiar with this context. After all, the main purpose of the interviews was the testimony, not its identification with a concrete individual. The statements and information generated from the interviews thus cannot stand on their own and must be combined with statistical data and data gathered in larger-scale projects, and with media coverage of the private publishing.

One of the very few local empirical projects that aimed at monitoring the social background of the immediate 'post-revolutionary' book scene was the study by Jan Halada mentioned above, titled *Publishers from the Sociological Perspective*, which was carried out in the early 1990s.³ Some of the issues Halada focused on were the personal, professional, and socio-economic characteristics and motivations of those who became involved in independent publishing during the years of 1991–1993. Halada drew his data from ninety responses to 180 questionnaires distributed among Czech publishers. Even this rather substantial sample, however, covered a fraction of all publishing subjects, whose number was at that time estimated to be as high as 2500, but it still provides one of the most detailed quantifiable pictures of the early 'transitional' book scene available at that time.⁴ Also, his sampling method largely relied on his own social networks: 60 % of the publishers he examined were based in Prague, only 6% in Brno, and the remaining ones worked in the provinces.⁵

One of the first issues examined in both our project and Halada's was the educational and experiential background of the publishers. Out of the nineteen publishers we interviewed in the late 1990s, four used to be involved in samizdat production prior to 1989, four emerged out former state-owned publishing houses, and two were former exile publishers. Nine of them had no previous experience in publishing

³ J. Halada (1996).

⁴ Similar critical remarks were raised, for example, by one of the direct participants in the book transition, Vladimír Pistorius, at a seminar "O možnostech studia knihy a knižní kultury" [On the Possibilities for Studying Books and Book Culture] organised by the VUTÍUM - Technical University Press in Brno on 1–2 September 2004.

⁵ The 50% rate of return that Halada got for his questionnaires was less a reflection of the publishers' responsible attitude to his project and more that of his social networks. Halada, a lecturer at Charles University, but also a former editor of a state-run publishing house and an active post-1989 publisher himself, possessed enough social capital to be able to demand answers to his questionnaires on any occasion, including at private parties, at Prague cafés or the simply on the street. His students also contributed significantly. From an informal set of discussions with Jan Halada in the Spring – Autumn 2003.

and came from a variety of previous professions, mostly related to some area of cultural or intellectual production within the official sphere. Thus, even within our rather limited sample, about two-thirds of publishers came from what could be defined as the state-controlled sphere, and about one-third from an alternative environment, i.e. samizdat production and exile publishing. Only four of them did not hold a university degree that had been acquired under the 'old regime'. In Halada's sample, 67% of the publishers were university graduates, 20% of his respondents entered private business with previous experience in (state) publishing, 6% were former book sellers, 15% used to work in some (state) culture-related institutions, and over one-half defined themselves as 'others'. In the light of such data, it is hard not to refer again to Havel's prophetic statement about the key role of the first, i.e. official, culture in any possible changes that were to follow the (inevitable) collapse of the communist government. While the prior professional experience of the new publishers was evidently diverse, the information about their educational and professional background suggests that the new publishing scene exhibited a high level of *continuity* with the previous era and that a significant part of the post-1989 publishers built up their new businesses on the basis of social, professional and cultural capital accumulated before November 1989.

More than one-half of the publishers we interviewed were, even in the late 1990s, still referring to a 'mission' as their major or partial motivation for entering into the business. Answers such as "I enjoy it", "I always liked books", and "it brings me a great deal of self-satisfaction" were often heard, too, along with references to publishing as a source of income, though this was not one of the predominant responses. It remains a question to what extent the 'mission' argument was intended to justify the great deal of self-sacrifice that building a new business required within the unsettled context of the early 1990s. It was a lack of initial capital, but also a certain level of self-confidence combined with the general 'let's-do-it' atmosphere in the early transition society that, at least at the beginning, led a significant number of the publishers who started their business in the early 1990s to do much of the work in the company on their own, without employing any full-time staff.⁶ For example, Viktor Stoilov, one of the youngest,

⁶ Only 14% of Halada's publishers claimed to have employed more than ten people, while over 40% of them were working essentially alone, occasionally with the help of part-timers.

and, later on, one of the most renowned publishers in the post-1989 publishing scene, emphasised in a number of published interviews and in private discussions that at the beginning of his career he 'knew nearly nothing' about publishing. He noted that back then he "did not even have stationery, let alone my own rubber stamp", and even by the mid-1990s he still did "everything on his own, including the contracts with authors, printers and distributors, promotion and most of the time even the typesetting".⁷

Subsequently, like much of the population, the new private publishers were overwhelmed by a heavy workload. Smaller publishers in our sample had one to three full-time staff members, the largest publishers had up to 120 full-time staff along with some part-timers. Still, by the late 1990s the publishers interviewed spoke of spending 10–18 hours a day at work. Some of them still then claimed "I sleep at work, when I wake up then I keep working, I go to sleep when I can't see anything anymore; I haven't had a weekend in twelve years", or "when I am in the process of completing a particular project I sleep for five hours, but there are periods when I can take two days off". Some also noted changes compared to the early days of their business: "at the beginning I used to do everything on my own; in 1996 I realised that if I went on like this I would collapse, and so would my business, and I began hiring people at least for the typesetting..."; and "at the beginning 100% of my own time went into the business, now [i.e. the late 1990s] I maintain a regular working week."

Another stubborn residuum of the pre-1989 publishing scene was the material and technological basis of the actual production of books, in other words, the printing and paper industries. It was estimated that more than 85% of basic equipment of the printing and binding industry was completely obsolete by the time the 'revolution' of 1989 arrived.⁸ The area of printing and paper production significantly contributed to a major redefinition of the distance between the manuscript and the reader. Perhaps more than any other area, this one became trapped between the pressures of the new markets and the legacy of the 'old regime'. The newly expanding book market pushed printers into reducing the production time of a book, which before 1989 used to take up

⁷ Viktor Stoilov, "Bezhlavý pád vzhůru," [Falling Head-over-Heels Upward], *Večerník Praha*, supplement *Dobry večer* 5/50 (10 March 1995): 3.

⁸ Václav Šmejkal, "Kniha výdaj člověka," [Books - Man's Expense], *Ekonom* 39/10 (1995): 29–33.

to two or three years. By the late 1990s all the publishers interviewed claimed that it takes approximately three to five months to produce a book, though with texts demanding lengthy editorial work it could even take up to several years. The printing industry thus underwent significant transformation as a result of privatisation, including the massive influx of new technologies, offset printing, advertising, and international influences and to the substantial transformation of the customer, who became much more differentiated according to 'cultural backgrounds and demands'. On the one hand, these changes enabled a speed and quality of production 'previously unimaginable'. On the other hand, the profession was opened up to a variety of individuals who were capable of "unbelievable achievements, as well as ups and downs; ... they often do not distinguish between day and night, ... they sleep in sleeping bags under their desks amidst technology worth millions of Crowns ... cash spins around at breathtaking speed, the demand is only slowly reaching its saturation point, prices move up and down on an ad hoc basis and the dates of delivery are negotiated in terms of days rather than months and weeks"⁹

There were essentially two types of private business set up in the printing industry shortly after 1989. First, smaller and middle-sized ventures were established and co-owned by (local) people who also then worked there. Larger ventures, including the largest Czech printing company, *Svoboda Press a. s.*, were for the most part owned by German investors.¹⁰ One consequence of the privatisation was an increase in the speed of production. Professionals in the field, journalists, and readers, nonetheless, complained about the decreasing quality

⁹ *Kdo je kdo v polygrafii a příbuzných oborech v České republice 1994* [Who's Who in Czech Printing and Related Fields in 1994], (Prague: Modrý jezdec, 1994), 151.

¹⁰ Svoboda Press a. s. – a former major communist printing and publishing company established in the early 1950s – with its 390 employees, annual printing production of 50,000 tonnes of paper, and a turnover of 1.8 milliard Czech Crowns is currently owned by the German Euro-Druckservice AG (EDS) in Passau, which is part of the above-mentioned Verlagsgruppe Passau. In addition to owning a major Czech printing venture called Vltava-Labe-Press, which, among other things, publishes important regional newspapers (*Deník Bohemia* and *Deník Moravia*), it also owns other leading printing companies such as TYPOS and TYPOS-Digital Print in Pilsen in West Bohemia, and Severotisk in North Bohemian. See for example "ÚOHS povolil nového majitele pro tiskárny Svoboda Press," [Office for the Protection of the Economic Competition Approved a New Owner for the Printing Company Svoboda Press], *MARKETING & MEDIA* (24 August 2006), http://mam.ihned.cz/1-10000115-19158270-101000_d-49 (accessed 20 September 2007); an official website of *Svoboda* at www.svoboda.cz (accessed 20 September 2007).

of books, their lousy, illegible print, about volumes falling apart due to poor binding, missing pages, messy layouts, and spelling mistakes in the text, while blaming the intervention of the most advanced reproduction technologies for having provided “the appearance of originality even to the most amateurish products”.¹¹ Professional and promotional literature also pointed to a re-definition of the very concept of a book. The ‘old’ books common in the 1970s and the 1980s may have often been “technologically imperfect, sometimes even over-decorated, but understood as a consistent piece of art with specific features of local quality”.¹² This kind of book was disappearing, at least temporarily, from the developing book market in the early 1990s, but its residua continued to be reflected in the high production costs publishers referred to in the interviews.

High production costs were another stubborn feature of the ‘transitional’ book business, which despite all the technological interventions and the privatisation of the entire system remained resistant to change. Compared to the Western European and American contexts, where production costs constitute about 10% to 20% of the total price of the book, the figures in most countries with a legacy of a command system in the past were incomparably higher. In addition, local private publishing could not remove itself from international pressures and were hit by the rising price of paper on the world market, unseen since the 1950s. Following the relative recovery of the world’s economy, the price of cellulose jumped from 340 USD a tonne at the beginning of 1994 to 850–900 USD in early 1995, and this development affected local paper and printing industries, too.¹³ In a report made in Budapest on books in Eastern Europe we read that in 1996 fourteen countries in the region cited production costs averaging 40.7% of the book price (with the average figure being slightly lower, at 35.9%, in 2000), while the Czech Republic and Poland had around 30% and Croatia just 15%.¹⁴ More than 20% of the publishers questioned by Halada in 1992–1993 claimed production costs accounted for as high as 30–40% of their total budget, and nearly 20% of publishers estimated costs of up to 40–50% of the

¹¹ *Kdo je kdo v polygrafii...* (1994), 151.

¹² *Ibid.*, 153.

¹³ V. Šmejkal (1995).

¹⁴ According to the survey conducted in 2000, which included twenty countries from the former Soviet region of Central Asia, in 2000, Armenia and Tajikistan, for example, had production costs as high as 53–54%. See “Table 10: Production Costs,” in *The Book Sector ...2000*, <http://www.budobs.org>

total budget, and 8% publishers even talked about costs as high as 50–60%. Although the production costs decreased gradually up to the end of the transition decade, at the beginning of the decade half of the local independent publishers reported production costs twice as high as in Western Europe.

The question of overhead costs is also complicated since individual publishers have various ways of defining this item and of estimating the part of their total budget under which they believe overhead is included. Approximately three-quarters of the publishers examined by Halada in the early 1990s claimed overhead costs at 10–20% of their total costs, and more than one-quarter cited overhead costs of 20–30% of the budget. For example, Ivo Železný stated in the early 1990s that only about one-half of his books were making a profit because of the enormous production and overhead costs. In his view, the economic gaps between the Western and Eastern contexts were to blame: “Overheads are still too high in relation to what a Czech customer can manage to pay for a book, particularly due to the high costs of foreign copyright. We print for Western prices but sell in relation to our salaries – at about a tenth of the British prices. Theoretically it is impossible to publish here...”¹⁵ While he himself – publishers with an approximate annual production of 1000 titles – made an unpromising theory into a successful practice, he was also among the first Czech publishers who by the mid-1990s began experimenting with printing books in Asia.

Most local publishers saw reducing high production costs and overheads as one of their priorities and having a high workload and working from home were areas where such ‘savings’ seemed possible.¹⁶ Another area where savings could be made was manuscript copyediting. About one-quarter of the publishers in Halada’s survey claimed they mostly edited the texts themselves and hired part-time (and not always fully qualified) editors just for specialised editorial projects. The review sections of the leading newspapers cited lists of spelling mistakes and lousy layouts identified in new books, while frequently referring to the local tradition of high-quality typescript preparation

¹⁵ Quoted in Timothy Garton Ash, ed., *Freedom for Publishing/Publishing for Freedom: The Central and East European Publishing Project* (Budapest, London, New York: CEU Press, 1995), 147.

¹⁶ One-half of all of the publishers questioned by Halada worked out of their home and only one-fifth of them were willing and/or able to rent office space.

and proofreading standards established by pre-revolutionary state-controlled professionals. Part of the problem was not just the new publishers' relaxed attitude towards copyediting, but also the pressing shortage of qualified editors as a result of the increased professional mobility after the revolution. Some observers even spoke of a kind of 'exodus' of skilled professionals from former state publishing houses into newly created jobs in advertising or to the rapidly expanding glossy magazines industry, i.e. areas supported by foreign investors and capable of offering wages that the undercapitalised developing sphere of private book publishing was unable to match. Publishers who were striving to gain a respectful and prestigious position in the market, such as Votobia, Torst, Paseka or Atlantis, did so by maintaining high editorial, typographic, and aesthetic standards in the work they published. However, reducing production costs remained an issue even for them. Subsidising financially demanding titles from the sale of postcards and calendars was one, though not the most efficient, way of doing this. Others saw the solution in the accumulation of the functions of the various stages of book production and distribution in the hands of one institutional subject, as a matter of fact as known previously in connection with samizdat. For example, Votobia, a publishing house based in the City of Olomouc, adopted such a solution and built its own printing house, book-binding facilities, and distribution company.¹⁷ If book history were simply to be understood as a set of developmental achievements, the multilateral roles of post-1989 Czech publishers could be regarded as a kind of step back into the 'pre-modern condition', a step that runs counter to the tendency towards specialisation that seems to dominate most of the professional spheres in the contemporary Western world.¹⁸ In the case of local publishing,

¹⁷ Pavel Mandys, "Kniha v džungli trhu," [A Book in the Market Jungle], *Týden* 2/49 (1995): 70.

¹⁸ This arrangement in a way echoes the conditions of the book scene in pre-revolutionary France examined by Darnton, where "publishing had not yet become distinguished from bookselling and printing as an autonomous activity". Ironically, many local 'post-revolutionary' publishers fit perfectly the definition of the French *éditeur* as "someone who takes care of another's work and has it printed", a definition quoted by Darnton from the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* of 1762. R. Darnton (1997), 53. For a further discussion of the difficulties associated with defining the 'publisher' in a strictly modern sense as "the party who arranges and pays for the publication of text" and further confusions surrounding the terminology of "printer" and "bookseller" in the book history see, for example, Eleanor F. Shevlin, "To Reconcile Book and Title, and Make 'em Kin to One Another": The Evolution of the Title's Contractual Functions," *Book History* 2/1 (1999): 69.

however, such seemingly ‘developmental setbacks’ were facilitated by the gradual introduction of more *advanced* information technology into local publishing. Consequently, the idea took hold that the machine on a publisher’s desk can replace several of the specialised tasks traditionally involved in producing a book, and what is more, it can get them done for virtually a fraction of the previous cost.

The introduction of new technology and the accumulation of several professional roles in the hands of one subject were accompanied by, and to a certain extent even supportive of, specific patterns of behaviour in the business. These included a high level of loyalty to the editors-in-chief, a tolerance of her or more often his ad hoc style of decision-making and the willingness of everyone involved to put up with late salaries, honoraria, and payments. Without these behavioural patterns, a ‘post-revolutionary’ publishing company could barely ever have continued to function. In addition, there were very few fixed rules about the way publishers, printers and distributors operated their business, and perhaps most importantly, communicated with each other. The relaxed attitude towards payments, delivery dates, and the quality of the books supplied were some of the other characteristics of the book business continually referred to in the interviews. Like many other aspects of transition-era publishing, the unsettled business culture and inefficient inter-company communication were to some extent offset by the strength of the informal social networks inherited from the pre-1989 era, which remained powerful during the early transition period. Even this area of production demonstrated the principles of the essentially sales slip-free economy characteristic of a transitional institution defined by a lack of reliability and accountability.¹⁹ It was often reliance on a deal made verbally in a pub rather than a written contract that guaranteed business arrangements. As numerous cases of fraud have shown, this model was also very risky. A verbal instead of a written ‘receipt’ may have been a temporary way of bridging the interim ‘post-revolutionary’ period, but it could not guarantee the sustainability of individual publishers or the new system of publishing as a whole.

¹⁹ For more on the transition economies, see János Kornai, *Highway and Byways: Studies on Reform and Postcommunist Transition* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994) and János Kornai and Susan Rose-Ackerman, eds., *Building a Trustworthy State in Post-Socialist Transition (Political Evolution and Institutional Change)* (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, June 2004).

Things began changing by the late 1990s, when from the nineteen publishers that we interviewed only the two smallest ones (with a yearly production between 5 to 15 titles) claimed to have done much of the copyediting on their own. Nevertheless, the accumulation of professional roles in the hands of a limited number of persons, such as the combined position of editor and publisher, for example, continued well beyond the first transitional decade and into the new millennium and the country's accession to the EU. As late as September 2004, the lack of specialisation and a stubborn tendency towards the accumulation of multiple tasks under the umbrella of a single post was discussed as a typical feature of contemporary publishing at a seminar for editors working for university publishers in Brno.²⁰ The participants, from all over the country, highlighted the continuing limited solvency of local publishing companies, which simply could not afford to hire a higher number of specialised professionals, as one of the key reasons for this practice. As one of the publishers interviewed in the late 1990s noted, "along with growing production the amount of work has risen considerably, but I still employ three people even though I have work for at least fifteen". Czech book production will always be dependent on a potential readership whose size is clearly incomparable to, say, that in Germany or the UK. As such, it generates a job market with opportunities for a limited number of persons, while requiring a certain level of professional flexibility, which may be unavoidable. Therefore, certain features and tendencies in the profession need not to be seen as a kind of temporary deviation from the 'norm' connected with a transitional period and therefore 'correctible', but rather as more or less intrinsic to its very nature within the specific, local context.

Among the issues that the people involved in publishing after 1989 identified as especially difficult was the lack of information on books in print and information about the current state of the market. While by the late 1990s, about half of the interviewed publishers admitted that 'things have improved significantly', another half still complained about the insufficient information on published books and the lack of transparency of the market and would have welcomed a return to a certain way of centralising of information. An editor-in-chief of a major Prague-based publishing house noted that publishers tend to be individualistic and keep their secrets. He had "a number of very good

²⁰ Seminar "O možnostech studia knihy ...," (Brno, 2004).

friends among publishers and even they would not tell me a single number. If they know you really well, they would tell you how many copies of a particular title they have sold. But they would not provide information about a decrease of profit. It is impossible to get any information about issues such as how much he has sold, what the percentage of unsold books out of the total print run is, or what the general trends are". The issue of insufficient information occupied a place in the dominant discourse of 'chaos' in the representation of the book world, particularly throughout the first half of the 1990s. Although some observers (Halada, Císar) were referring to the emerging signs of the 'stabilisation' of the market since 1995, the media continued to produce a different image. For example, Daniel Anýž, one of the few journalists who systematically monitored the local book scene noted in a revealingly titled article 'Efforts to Map the Book Market Are Still in Vain' that "the book market finds itself in a total information and distribution chaos and according to some publishers and booksellers it survives only due to a kind of miracle".²¹ A similar point was made by the representatives of the Czech Union of Booksellers and Publishers, who (as late as 2002) questioned the possibility of making any competent evaluation of the market for yet another decade.

These calls for more accurate information and knowledge continued to emerge despite the fact that several sources of information on published books existed. Those established earlier, such as the ISBN agency and the bibliographical databases (*Česká národní bibliografie*) operating in the National Library, and the Czech Statistical Office, which published a statistical *Yearbook*, continued their respective activities after 1989. The Union collected relevant data on books in print, too, and till 2001 published a weekly devoted to newly released books *Nové knihy* (New Books). It also set up a bibliographical database, CODEX, and founded *Books in Print*, which included records of approximately 7000 titles. The above-mentioned *Almanach Labyrint*, a privately produced summary of basic information about those publishers willing to provide them has been published annually since 1992 mainly for commercial purposes. Numerous occasional catalogues of wholesale book companies and surveys released by the Ministry of Culture, largely based on data provided by the Czech Statistical Office, were

²¹ Daniel Anýž, "Snaha zmapovat knižní trh je zatím marná," [Efforts to Map the Book Market are Still in Vain], *Mladá Fronta Dnes* 6 (11 November 1995): 8.

also available for reference. However, none of these initiatives provided a complete picture of the local book scene. The representatives of the Union emphasised on a number of formal and informal occasions that since the early 1990s no complete or basic marketing study had yet been made that could provide economically relevant data on the developing book market, its supply and demand, let alone any historically or sociologically oriented accounts of the book producers and readers themselves.²² Although some publishers, such as Ivo Železný, saw no value in such a study for the day-to-day operations of their businesses, many of those active in the post-1989 book world considered the lack of records and information to be a major shortcoming, not only from the entrepreneurial perspective, but also from the more general point of view of the country's cultural and intellectual traditions.²³

Projects aimed at monitoring the book-related institutions and their production were often isolated from each other, they tended to be fragmented and their results and data were often mutually contradictory. The amount of complaints about the issue of insufficient information seemed to outnumber any efforts to systematically address this problem. The public presentation of the few projects conducted on book-related topics was also far from consistent. Some summaries of research results were published in professional or semi-professional journals (*Čtenář* 12/1994; *Ekomon* 19/1994). Current stories were occasionally covered by daily newspapers (*MF Dnes*, *Lidové noviny*) and specialised journals devoted to culture and the book market itself (*Tvar*, *Nové knihy*), while the major literary periodical *Literární noviny* largely failed to monitor either the institutional background of the world of books or related research and analyses. Not even the ISBN office of the National Library was able to provide fully credible information; its experts estimated that their statistics managed to cover about 80% of the actual production by the early 1990s. While it was mainly the publishers themselves who suffered from and consequently complained about the incomplete information on the market, it was to a large extent their own ignorance about registering the titles they produced that contributed to the obscure picture of the local scene. Some were

²² From the author's informal discussions with Jaroslav Císař and Jan Kanzelsberger between 1997 and 2000.

²³ Ivo Železný at the symposium on "Publishing in Europe" held at the Donau-Universität Krems in April 1996. This symposium also served as an establishing meeting of the *Krems Kreis*, an association of publishers from Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

simply 'too busy' to care, others wanted to cover up their own shortcomings and commercial weak points. Some were afraid that providing truthful information about their publications would make them more vulnerable to the competition. A certain – and perhaps not even an intentional – counter-reaction or allergy to the previously over-controlled and over-organised command book system may also have played a role in this. And perhaps the relaxed registration practices and a certain level of fogginess about the state of affairs, and a lack of transparency may for many have been a welcome and even comfortable arrangement. Lamented by some and silently facilitated by others, this lack of information was generally accepted as something that *de facto* helped to keep the business going, and in some way even helped to overcome the vagaries of the transition period.

This approach, particularly to ISBN registration, only began to change in the mid-1990s. Legislation specifying the items to be included in the imprint of every book published in the country came into effect in 1996. Although it was hardly ever observed in full, it supported tendencies towards regulating and stabilising the book scene. For example, a senior representative of the Union, Jaroslav Císař, noted that over the course of 1996 it was possible to witness a decrease in the number of smaller publishers. This development involved their merging with more active larger publishers and the bankruptcy of smaller publishers. This tendency was reflected in the statistics – the number of publishers decreased by nearly 20% between 1996 (2,857) and 1997 (2,251). The estimated share of published books registered in the ISBN also rose slightly, to 83% of total production. Publishers themselves gradually became more disciplined about submitting mandatory (legal deposit) copies of each book published to the National Library. At the same time, the number of books published a year grew continually, and this growth was not just superficially generated by the more accurate registration of titles. In terms of the genre structure of local production, the share of fiction books continually decreased in favour of a growing percentage of non-fiction titles.²⁴

The issue of bookselling and bookstores in particular also became the subject of media discourses of horror and disaster shortly after November 1989. The closure of the state central distribution company

²⁴ Jaroslav Císař, "Základní fakta o českém trhu," [Basic Facts about the Czech Book Market], *Knihkupec a nakladatel* 2/5 (1997): 12. Based on data provided by the National ISBN Agency.

Kniha on 31 May 1991 was expected to ruin all the bookstores in the country, and the print media did their best to reinforce these apocalyptic visions. Despite all the calls for freedom of speech and free access of information, bookselling free of central co-ordination seemed impossible. One Brno-based bookseller described his somewhat traumatic experience of the 'revolutionary' circumstances as follows: "The [central] distributor did not turn up for the first time in December 1989. For the next half a year he used to come approximately once a month. Since much of my stock was unsaleable trash, I myself began to look after the supply. At first things were rather wild, as the state company Kniha was hit by secondary insolvency and much of the bookselling was taken over by street vendors. We booksellers were no longer paid, and for another half year I was ordering books on credit and just hoping for some turnover. Then I gave up – I had neither the energy nor the money to buy the shop and I had no entrepreneurial talents either. My last action was to sell political books by weight."²⁵ In the light of this testimony it may not be surprising that the gloomy expectations in 1991 were that the number of bookstores in Prague itself would drop from several hundred to twenty. Bookselling became even more complicated, not just owing to the disintegration of central distribution, but also as a result of the restitution processes that were in progress in the country as a part of the general privatisation process. Many of the restituted buildings were literally falling apart, and as such they were in desperate need of reconstruction. Commercial rents were one of the ways of funding such costly projects, but booksellers, unlike, say, computer dealers, could rarely afford to pay the escalating rents. Consequently, a bookstore going bankrupt – often housed in an attractive, central urban location – could easily end up in auction, along with the entire inventory of unsold (and probably unsaleable) books. Following the unwritten law shared by Czech publishers, booksellers, and readers that books should not be burnt, simply getting rid of the stock would have been out of question. Even some of the most explicitly profit-oriented professionals in the business, like Železný, admitted still in the late 1990s that local publishers or booksellers would hesitate to destroy unsold stocks, a practice quite common in Western publishing.²⁶ Such a 'business', loaded with unwanted books, represented

²⁵ Interview conducted 6 November 2001 in Brno.

²⁶ Ivo Železný at a working seminar of Krems Kreis held 17–19 July 1997 in Vienna.

anything but an attractive investment opportunity for potential buyers, especially in small cities and towns.

Booksellers themselves may have been interested in purchasing the ex-state stores they worked in, and there were various motivations for doing so: some just wanted to keep their jobs going, others argued the desire to preserve for their community a bookstore that traditionally carried a great deal of symbolic capital, and echoes of a cultural mission resonated in 'post-revolutionary' bookselling, too. Such intentions soon clashed with the realities of the new competitive market and the frequent lack of initial capital. Unless there was money available from restituted family property or other entrepreneurial activities, most booksellers were in no position to invest in their own business. Prior to 1989, booksellers were famously underpaid, like most professionals in the service sector, including cultural services, and there was little opportunity for generating any major extra income in the shadow economy. Bookselling 'under the counter' did exist in the 1980s, but the potential to make profits on the side was much lower than, for instance, in selling cars or working in a pub. Local banks – at least in the early 1990s – showed little appreciation for the value of the symbolic capital attached to books and were reluctant to provide loans for bookselling, which was seen as more of an unprofitable business at that time. The declining number of bookstores was not as pressing in the larger cities, because the wider range of alternative sales, including the mushrooming number of street vendors, to some extent compensated for it. However, in smaller towns the liquidation of the only local bookstore often meant the end of 'professional bookselling'. Needless to say, the local media were ready to frame these developments as yet more evidence that the 'end of books' was near.²⁷ Contrary to all the pessimistic predictions, the number of bookstores began to grow again gradually in the mid-1990s. According to the Union there were approximately 800 bookstores operating in the country by the end of the transition decade and around 2000 locations (supermarkets, etc.) where books were sold as a part of their sales stock.²⁸

²⁷ Much of this information comes from informal discussions with Prague booksellers between 1989 and 1995. For an example of the media coverage of post-1989 bookselling, see Jana Klusáková, "Sbohem knihy. Ekonomické podmínky knižní distribuce v ČSFR," [Farewell Books. Economic Conditions of Book Distribution in the CSFR], *Respekt* 24 (17–13 June 1991): 15.

²⁸ Jaroslav Císař, "Distribuce a prodej knih v České republice," [Distribution and Sale of Books in the Czech Republic], www.sckn.cz (accessed 23 April 2005).

Private bookselling soon produced its 'stars', such as Bohumil Fišer, Jan Kanzelsberger, Jiří Seidl and Vratislav Ebr, to name just a few based in Prague. They managed to live through the twists and turns of the early 1990s, not just by means of a high level of flexibility in adapting to the new conditions but also by 're-investing' the solid social and cultural capital they accumulated under the 'old regime' in the private business context. As a matter of fact, despite all the pressures of the new market conditions, booksellers seemed to represent one of the most professionally and socially compact groups in the institutional chain of book production and distribution. Unlike, for example, the editors of publishing houses, not to mention the authors themselves, they suffered perhaps the least political persecution and social pressures imposed on book professionals by the pre-1989 regime and thus were likely to stay in the profession for a longer period of time. During the early 1990s, some bookstores became more differentiated according to the personality of the bookseller, to the genre profile, the targeted readers-consumers, but also the quality of their stock. Bohumil Fišer, whose Prague bookshop, located near the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, was even under the previous regime already catering mainly to academic and intellectual readers, noted in a newspaper interview that the organisation of books on store shelves by genre is a key distinguishing feature of a 'good bookstore'; according to Seidl, who runs an intellectually oriented bookshop in a street off Wenceslas Square, a good store is able to offer both newly released books and older 'important' titles, and also emphasised the importance of having sales staff that are knowledgeable but not imposing.²⁹ Thus while some individual booksellers were trying to build up a special profile for their shop, others were gradually working on rapidly expanding their companies, revealing a clear commercial vision. The distributor and bookseller Jan Kanzelsberger, in an interview conducted in the spring of 1997, enthusiastically referred to the (centralised and monopolising) bookselling model of companies like Barnes & Noble and Waterstones as something that would put an end to the chaos of the Czech market. By the turn of the millennium, the first chain booksellers (including Kanzelsberger himself) began to emerge in major cities, mainly in

²⁹ In Zita Nidlová and Marcela Titzlová, "Trnitou cestou za knihou," [The Thorny Path Towards Books], *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, supplement *Víkend* 6/12 (14 January 1995): 1.

Prague and Brno, and expanded further as large shopping malls developed in the early 2000s.

On a smaller scale, in the provincial towns, many seemingly nameless booksellers, usually women, managed to continue their businesses during the 1990s. It could be said they secured a relatively high level of social *continuity* between the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. Thus, despite the revolutionary rhetoric of disruption and chaos spread by the media, and to a large extent supported by private and public statements made by the publishers and booksellers even bookselling, an area that underwent perhaps the most intense process of commercialisation during the first transitional decade, showed a great deal of dependency on the legacies of the pre-1989 'first culture'. What the booksellers themselves saw as the biggest problem of the developing market was the lack of centralised coordination of new releases. While, for example, Bohumil Fišer, had set up a computer database of 8000 titles by 1995, this was by no means the norm.³⁰ Still in 1997 Ivo Železný noted that only 5% of booksellers worked with computers. In his view, the local book market did not suffer so much from a lack of bookstores but from a lack of qualified and IT-literate booksellers. According to Železný, at that time most of the booksellers still considered the Internet to be "an expensive hobby with no substantial commercial value".³¹

In addition to resisting the introduction of new technologies, another conservative aspect of the book business in the early 1990s that also demonstrated *continuity* with the pre-1989 period was the behaviour of Czech book buyers. Anyone familiar with book sales prior to 1989 would have immediately spotted the differences in the post-1989 style of bookselling. To start with, the physical and spatial aspects of bookselling completely changed. The over-the-counter system, which made it difficult to distinguish between a bookstore and a pastry shop, was abandoned in favour of the open shelf sale. Browsing became the norm, the queues in front of book shops disappeared, and the position of the bookseller changed as well. He or she was no longer the embodiment of a physical and symbolic barrier between the bookshelves and the buyer. The role of the bookseller began to range from a

³⁰ Ibid., 1.

³¹ Ivo Železný at a working seminar of Krems Kreis held 17–19 July 1997 in Vienna.

consultant to browsing customers in specialised shops, to an untrained guard dog whose main task was to prevent books from being stolen. Despite all these very apparent changes, however, some aspects of local book-buyers' behaviour remained consistent with the past: with 60% of the population buying at least a book a month, the rate of book-buying remained high among the population and domestic libraries relatively large; and consumers continued to prefer hardbacks to paperbacks.³² In a survey of the behaviour of book buyers, booksellers claimed that about three-quarters of their customers were regular, long-term customers. But only one-third of the booksellers included in the survey claimed that their regular customers were mostly intellectuals and students. It would seem that the book buyers who were regularly visiting the majority of the bookstores came from a variety of social backgrounds, and book buying was still by no means an elitist activity in the 1990s.³³ As already noted, readers, publishers, and booksellers maintained a similarly conservative and ambivalent stance towards any tools to promote sales, including advertising, at least throughout the first half of the 1990s. After decades of an essentially advertisement-free culture, local book consumers continued to view any form of explicit promotion as somewhat controversial. Promotion of any kind still seemed somewhat like propaganda, a tool of 'communication' people remembered well from the 'old days' and the population in general terms still largely resisted things being imposed on them. Also, consumers may have seen advertising as a desperate way of selling an otherwise unsalable commodity.

³² According to a survey conducted by the agency Factum in the first half of the 1990s, 36% of the examined sample of reader-consumers bought one book a month, 19% two to three books, and 5% five books a month; so more than 60% of the sample would buy more than one book a month (Quoted in Zita Nidlová, et al., (1995): 1.). A survey conducted by a research team at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University on a sample of 1,200 readers of the weekly *Nové knihy* – that is, people who were already showing an interest in books by the very fact that they had bought this periodical, so by no means a representative sample of the population as a whole – found that 85% of respondents claimed to be 'regular readers' and over 40% of them were reading 'every day' (the world average is about 3%), while 44% said they owned a library larger than 1000 volumes. Quoted in Kateřina Eliášová, "Kniha - nejlepší přítel člověka?" [The Book – Man's Best Friend?], *Lidové noviny* (10 May 1995): 16.

³³ Martin Koptiš, Ondřej Přerovský, "Co na sebe prozrazují. Knihkupci a čtenáři ve výzkumu I," [What They Reveal about Themselves. Booksellers and Readers in Research I], *Nové knihy* 15 (1995): 9; "Jak se kniha prodává? Knihkupci a čtenáři ve výzkumu II," [How to Sell a Book? Booksellers and Readers in Research I, II], *Nové knihy* 16 (1995): 12.

The 'good-books-sell-themselves' attitude of many new independent publishers in the early transitional period was another echo of the patterns and expectations established before 1989. The times when mere rumours about the possible release of an attractive title used to provoke a desire in readers to obtain a copy were not that far in the past. Promotion and advertising meant visibility, and visibility and publicity, or even a too obvious achievement used to generate suspicion and potential risk or harassment. In the early 1990s, the new book professionals seemed to believe, and indeed the new booming market experience seemed to confirm that the public will always find their way to a 'worthwhile' item, be it a piece of music, a painting or a book, even if it is not necessarily stuck under their nose. Anything 'officially' promoted might by definition have been viewed with suspicion, and this attitude, generally accepted during the previous era, resisted change for quite some time, despite all the 'revolutionary' events and rhetoric that accompanied them. The continuation of traditions, stereotypes, and expectations established during the pre-1989 era thus co-shaped attitudes towards promotion. Marketing and advertising, which in Western book economies account for around 20% of the book price, were almost non-existent in the early transition-era book markets. According to Halada's survey, even in 1993 almost 70% of local publishers still had not considered organising book-signing events for their authors, even though this had become a very popular type of event, when the booksellers Koháček and Fišer began organising such events as early as the late 1980s. Needless to say, in the 1980s the purpose of such gatherings was less about the promotion of a particular author, whose books people would buy even without the shows. It was about creating an opportunity for an informal (free of control, which was rather rare in those times) get-together of people connected by similar cultural and intellectual inclinations.

The hesitancy about advertising, however, stemmed from the above-noted continuity of pre-1989 values and attitudes, including the sense of 'mission' that publishers felt, and the existence of an ideal about how 'sophisticated' a book should be, as discussed above. What also lay behind the initial reluctance to engage in book advertising was the strong belief that a cultural production has a kind of eternal intrinsic power, a view traditionally shared by the local intellectual and arts community, regardless of what political regime was in power. In other words, the prevailing idea, loudly voiced by the local media especially even throughout the 1990s, was that a *book* is a unique object

that cannot and should not be mistaken for a commodity. Even those publishers we interviewed who were willing to accept advertising – which many others viewed as ‘book prostitution’ – as an unpleasant but unavoidable part of the newly commercialised cultural life, preferred the tools of promotion they adopted in pre-1989 practices. At most they would place a notice in a literary magazine or a cultural section of a newspaper, or they would ask a (preferably friend) journalist to write a (preferably positive) review, or they might send a reference to an information periodical published by one of the distribution companies, or perhaps they would have agreed to an interview for a local radio show.

Železný’s argument (based on a several vague examples he gave about market-driven publishing ‘abroad’) that “advertising is almighty ... Culture has no chance to compete with advertising, for it will never produce financial resources large enough to convince the decisive majority of people about its qualities”, was still a marginal view in the early 1990s, and even provoked counter-reaction from the intellectual community.³⁴ Although publishers must have realised by the mid-1990s that a ‘good book’ would no longer just sell itself, by the late 1990s, most of the publishers we interviewed still talked rather vaguely about promotion. It was not uncommon for them to claim things like ‘there isn’t much time and money left’ and ‘investments into promotion are not economically effective yet’. Publishers even contradicted each other in their views on effective tools of promotion; one would claim that newspaper reviews are the most efficient tool of promotion, while another rejected the influence of the print media and insisted that without television books cannot sell, and yet others believed that televised literary programmes are ‘ridiculous’ and only harm books and that it is radio that is the best medium for attracting the attention of readers. Authors’ readings and promotion tours were rarely used, which could be partly explained by the relatively limited number of

³⁴ From an interview with Ivo Železný in Lubor Kasal, “Chci si hrát,” [I Want to Play], *Tvar* 23 (1993): 7. Železný’s view was contradicted, for example, by Alena Wágnerová, a writer and journalist who, based on her own experience with West German publishing and bookselling noted that “besides those people who see the sense of their lives in making money, there is fortunately a large number of outsiders who do their job because they love it, they see some sense in it and its material effect is more or less secondary to them ...”. In Alena Wágnerová, “Muka přiblížnosti. K rozhovoru s Ivo Železným,” [The Agony of Approximation. An Interview with Ivo Železný], *Tvar* 33–34 (1993): 10.

best-selling authors in the country. Pre-paid prime shelving space in a chain bookstore or massive advertising campaigns commonly used on the North American and West European book markets would have been unimaginable in the local transitional context for much of the 1990s.

The representation of another issue closely associated with sales, namely distribution, was also wrapped in the discourse of chaos. Distribution attracted massive media attention because it was one of the first institutions in the entire chain of activities related to book production that started falling apart after 1989. Following the privatisation of bookstores and publishers, an 'empty space' emerged in both the production and reception parts of the book-related institutional framework. The central distribution company, Knižní velkoobchod, stopped distributing books, and, subsequently, it accumulated a stocks of books worth 3.5 billion CSK.³⁵ The company's debts, its giant stocks, and the controversial attempts of the government to intervene generated public curiosity. In the company's warehouses, previously banned titles released in overestimated print runs shortly after November 1989 joined the piles of unsaleable works produced by state-controlled publishers prior to 1989 and books from the stocks of the liquidated bookstores. The image of works by Lenin and Havel laying side by side in a barn in a central Bohemian town inspired the media's imagination and by extension the imagination of the entire intellectual and cultural community.

Despite its increasing insolvency, this book wholesaling company continued to buy more and more books from publishers, with the unwritten understanding that 'the centre' – in this case the Ministry of Culture – would ultimately cover up its financial obligations. Destroying these volumes would have been perhaps the most economically efficient option, but it was precisely the vision of the possible 'burning of books' that caused public outrage. The image was reinforced by references to the good old Jesuit Koniáš, or the poetic figure of Hant'a in Hrabal's *Too Loud a Solitude*, sitting amidst banned books in a recycling centre. For example, the literary critic Sergej Machonin mobilised all "historians, Czech language teachers and technical and humanities intelligentsia" to buy and thus 'save' particularly

³⁵ From an interview with Jaroslav Císař of the Union of Czech Booksellers and Publishers, a former clerk of Ministry of Culture during the early 1990s. 6 March 2001.

endangered books, which had been condemned to such a “grotesque fate” by the “opportunists of our current publishing”, though their “only sin was their unquestionable timeless value”. Machonin raised his voice when formerly exiled publisher Alexander Tomský informed him “with a tear in his eye” that volumes of a book by a previously banned historian Josef Pekař *O smyslu českých dějin* (On the Sense of Czech History), which nobody wants to buy despite their lowered price of 35 CSK, might need to be recycled.³⁶ Symptomatically, it was the ‘cultural ignorance’ of the local reading and intellectual community, rather than the clearly unrealistic print runs of some of the respective titles (i.e. 50 000 in the case of the Pekař’s book), that were blamed in these clarion calls to action.

The privatisation of the central state-run distribution company and its district branches put an end to its monopolistic position on the book market. It was the Ministry of Culture that coordinated the privatisation process of wholesalers and distributors and decided not to liquidate particular district branches all at once all but rather one by one at three-month intervals. Thus, in order to prevent a total flooding of the market, books were sold off gradually in various parts of the country.³⁷ The privatisation process was also intensely played out in the media, as many of those involved in the liquidation procedures soon established their own distribution companies and what followed was the uncontrolled expansion of small distributors. By the mid-1990s it was estimated that about 70 to 80 distribution companies were operating in the country.³⁸ There was no way of maintaining an orientation in the expanding distribution networks, and it became impossible to at least basically monitor their activities. The growing number of distribution companies created a number of regional, mutually isolated, markets. A title released by a West Bohemian publisher in the city of Pilsen would probably rarely been available a few hundred miles away, in the North Moravian city of Olomouc. To confuse matters even further, one title was often distributed by a number of distributors at the same time. Publishers were forced to increase print runs in order to balance the growing distribution expenses and consequently to run the risk of accumulating unsold books. The predictable result was lower

³⁶ See Sergej Machonin, “Groteskní osud...” [Grotesque Fate...], in *Literární noviny* 2/23 (6 June 1991): 6.

³⁷ From an interview with Jaroslav Císař, May 2001.

³⁸ Ibid.

profit per title, growing debts and the threat of bankruptcy. What both publishers and distributors shared were complaints: profits were too low and debts were too high.

This transitional environment made the work of booksellers and librarians particularly challenging. The rather rapid de-centralisation and privatisation of distribution did not seem to usher in the expected advantages of the market: transparent and effective communication between all institutional subjects involved. Instead, one feature of the market economy that began to materialise in the 1990s was the bankruptcy of the distribution companies. In the light of all these circumstances it may be no surprise that only forty percent of the publishers questioned in the Halada's survey in the early 1990s claimed to have contracted designated distribution companies, while the rest were trying to seek alternative avenues for getting books to the customers, including their own vehicles and backpacks. By the mid-1990s some stronger distributors tried to find their way out of this vicious cycle of mutual obligations and a lack of basic coordination, and they began focusing on specialised types of production and on merging smaller units into larger ventures, which seemed to be the most effective way forward. Consequently, the majority of publishers interviewed in the late 1990s were already working with a limited number of established distributors, while some of the biggest ones, such as *Železný*, set up their own distribution company. Despite gradual mergers of smaller companies, distribution continued to be – at least according to publishers' and booksellers' testimony – the weakest and most problematic part of the entire transitional book scene in the 1990s. Though the number of distributors was gradually decreasing by the end of the decade, only about ten of the major distributors managed to achieve a turnover allowing a growing profit and further development of the company. By the late 1990s the speed of the distribution of a title significantly increased and it also became easier for a bookseller to trace it. Quicker distribution allowed a quicker renewal of stock. However, it also created conditions where the leading distributors began to focus on a limited number of potentially attractive titles and on publishers who could not only produce a larger number of titles a year, but could produce them at a lower price and with a better chance of profit. The developing book market, somewhat spoiled by the unusually high and easy sales in the months just after 1989, soon became stuck in a new trap – the flow of bestsellers.

Even those wholesalers who would have been willing to invest in new warehouses with a capacity large enough to hold the necessary

stock of books in constant demand ran the risk of becoming unprofitable due to the pressure from others focused on a quick turnover. Booksellers had no choice but to join in this game. They began to request an increasingly higher number of newly released titles in as small a number of copies as possible, and at the same time tried to limit the shelf-life of every single book. Thus a book buyer had little chance of finding a particular title on the bookseller's shelf for longer than three months after its release. The practice of ordering certain books via post, or on-line, was still rather uncommon during the 1990s. Access to information had improved since the publication of *Books in Print* in 1996. But the major barrier remained the costs of postage and bank transfer fees, a barrier even more powerful if we consider the at that time still cash-oriented payment culture, where credit-card payment was essentially unavailable to the majority of local book-buyers. Total shipping expenses often added up to a sum equal to or even higher than the price of a book itself, and that was a deterrent to the practice of sending books by post until at least the late 1990s.³⁹

Since November 1989, one of the most frequently discussed issues, and one that also fits the discourse of the 'crisis of the book', has been the rise in book prices. Headlines in the print media like 'Books Ten Times More Expensive?' and 'Will There Be Any Money Left for Culture?', or 'Is Czech Literature to Die?' frequently followed the first steps taken by private publishers.⁴⁰ Some observers believed that the rising prices of paper, printing, and other production costs would force new publishers to reduce the massive and apparently overestimated and thus unsaleable print runs and in this way book prices could be kept at a more or less stable level. Others argued that it is the production of a limited number of titles in higher print runs that could keep the prices down and still guarantee a profit. Nonetheless, the main issue was not so much the actual price of books but rather a radical re-definition of the entire pricing system, in which prior to 1989 most items were given a price as a fixed entity relatively resistant to change.⁴¹

³⁹ Even in 1997 at the Krems Kreis seminar mentioned above Ivo Železný was still noting the high costs of postage.

⁴⁰ These titles emerged in articles published in *Lidové noviny* and *Mladá fronta (Dnes)* during November 1989–March 1992.

⁴¹ Prices were a key regulator in the centrally planned market, and as such they remained relatively fixed for political as well as ideological reasons. In the late 1960s, a massive revaluation of wholesale prices was undertaken in Czechoslovakia in order to bring prices closer to a market-clearing level, make them sensitive to demand and production costs, and make them more approximate to world levels. As this price

While after 1989 that system no longer corresponded with the principles of a newly developing competitive market, the very notion of a relatively stable, *regulated* and thus readily accessible book price established during the command era, and indeed promoted by communist propaganda, was not easy to challenge. Slogans such as ‘everyone can afford a book’ were indeed very powerful and socially effective tools for disseminating the ideology of the ‘old regime’ while successfully covering up the highly selective nature of the category of a ‘generally affordable book’. The stubborn binary opposition between the egalitarian notion of a ‘socialist’ book (or any cultural ‘product’ for that matter) as a means of social inclusion, and the ‘commercialised’ book as a (potential) tool of social exclusion hovered silently in the background of much of the post-1989 debates on book prices.

The resulting story of the transition-era book was slightly self-contradicting. The media agonised over the growing prices of books, while, paradoxically, they reproduced the discursive patterns used in communist propaganda and its tendency to employ economic and numerical evidence to present its ideological achievements. If the communists had called for getting more books into the ‘hands of the people’ in order to support their specific notion of ‘national culture’, then the post-1989 prophets warned that taking books out of the ‘hands of the people’ by raising their prices would inevitably destroy the ‘national culture’. Contrary to the alarming media messages, the prices of ‘cultural products’ (from books to movie tickets) were rising only gradually and by no means replicated the full growth in production costs or the development of the market in the immediate post-revolutionary years. Even in this case, it was partly the *continuity of expectations* instituted prior to 1989 that erected a strong psychological barrier

revision almost ruined the reform, other measures had to be put in place, including a further categorisation of prices, changing the system of planning and the role of the state. It took the ‘normalisers’ several years to re-establish what people perceived as economic security, and consequently data on consumer expectations began to show signs of stabilisation again by the early 1970s. If, according to opinion polls, in December 1968, 88% of respondents believed that prices ‘will rise’, the number of such ‘sceptics’ had decreased to 14% by June 1971 and remained at the level of 22% in the early 1970s. Between 52% and 59% of respondents were convinced that prices ‘will stay the same’ during 1971–1974, while in December 1968 the figure was only 6%. See Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 22–23, 44. Data on price expectations are quoted in reference to the Kabinet pro výzkum veřejného mínění, č.j. 8/77–4.

in the minds of book-buyers and, consequently, made any sudden 'revolution' in book prices unacceptable, at least throughout the early 1990s. The production and reception sides of the book business could never reach a consensus. On the one hand, publishers complained that given the current (low) prices of books they were unable even to cover the costs of production, which were gradually approaching Western levels. On the other hand, book buyers, already burdened with the rising costs of living in all spheres of life, complained when the price of a book no longer matched the price of a packet of butter.

The deeply ingrained memories or notions of the 'cheap' cultural economy of the 'old regime' were to some extent false. Prices were relatively stable only at some periods between 1948 and 1965 and during the 1970s, and even those periods saw price fluctuations and major differences in the prices of different kinds of books. The impression of price stability (prior to 1989 the price of a book was always recorded in its imprint) was partly supported by the fact that within a shorter period of time, say 1970 and 1975, the prices of books of a comparable size and genre indeed changed very little. But so did the average wages of the population. Considerable differences, though, existed in the prices of books of different genres, sizes, graphic designs, and so on, but it is hard to identify any clear 'developmental' principle in book pricing within a particular period of, say, several decades. Just as an example, it is possible to look at the prices of a few randomly selected (hard bound) volumes published in former Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic between the 1960s and the mid 2000s.

Although the table below offers just a limited overview of prices and average incomes and can by no means be taken as a fully representative account of book prices during the period observed, it can at least illustrate a few trends. A certain degree of book price stability could be identified during the period between the 1960s and the 1980s. Nonetheless, book prices cannot be isolated from the overall economic context of the respective periods; at least a rough, and necessarily brutally simplified, comparison with the consumer prices of other selected goods would be required to put 'cheap books under socialism' into perspective. In 1960, for instance, a person with a monthly income of 1300 CSK could buy a book for 13CSK (i.e. one percent of his or her monthly income) while a one-kilo loaf of bread would cost 2.60 CSK and a quarter kilo of butter 9.50 CSK but a TV set cost 3500 CSK, nearly three times his or her monthly salary. A decade later, say in 1975, when an average book would still cost about one percent of a

Selected book prices and average wages 1960s–2000s

Title*	Price**	Date of publication	No of pages	Print run	Approx. average nominal monthly wage.**
V. Lacina, <i>Čtení o psaní</i> [Readings on Writing]	13	1962	200	12 000	1960: 1303
F. Kafka, <i>Zámek</i> *** [The Castle]	20	1969	410	15 000	1970: 1915
M. M. Bachtin,**** <i>François Rabelais ...</i> (academic book)	53	1975	400	2000	1975: 2313
B. Hrabal, <i>Oštre sledované vlaky</i> [Closely Watched Trains]	20	1980	90	70 000	1980: 2656
J. Skácel, <i>Uspávanky</i> [Bedtime Stories]; (children's poetry)	30	1983	100	30 000	1985: 2920
			A4 paper size, illustrated		
J. Pijoan, <i>Dějiny umění</i> , Vol. 9 [History of Art]	170	1983	330	40 000	1985: 2920
			A4, glossy paper, 325 photographs		
J. A. Liehm, <i>Generace</i> (interviews with Czech writers)	39	1990	460	36 000	1990: 3286
S. Machonin, <i>Příběh...</i> (memoirs)	99	1995	300	*****	1995: 8172
J. Škvorecký, <i>Mirákl</i> [Miracle]	199	1997	540	*****	1997: 10 082
M. Hroch, <i>Na prahu národní existence</i> (hist. non-fiction)	199	1999	270	*****	1999: 12 666
P. Machonin, <i>Česká společnost ...</i> (academic book)	289	2005	280	*****	2005: 18 220
					(Re: June 05)

* A random selection of books from this author's personal library.

** Prices and monthly wages prior to 1993 are in Czechoslovak Crowns, since 1993 in Czech Crowns; prices from the 1990s include 5% VAT.

*** No other edition or reprint of Kafka's *The Castle* was released in Czech between 1969 and 1989.

**** *François Rabelais and His World* translated from Russian.

***** Print run and prices have not been included in the imprint since around 1992; prices after 1990 are quoted from the figure pencilled into the book by the bookseller.

Sources for average wages: Statistical yearbooks: *Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1985–1992*; *Statistická ročenka ČR 1993–2004*; Czech Statistical Office (www.csu.cz, accessed August 2005).

person's monthly income, an academic book, like Bakhtin's book on Rabelais, would already be nearly twice as much. That same year the price of a loaf of bread would still be 2.60 CSK, and a quarter kilo of butter would also be around the same price (10 CSK), though a TV set was cheaper in relation to incomes (4000 – i.e. less than two monthly incomes). However, to buy a Škoda car, for instance, at 45 100 CSK, a person had to put aside almost twenty monthly incomes.⁴²

At the same time, the price of Pijoan's book suggests an even more complex story. This ninth volume of an exclusive series of translated texts on the history of art, which contained rich illustrative materials printed on relatively good-quality paper, indicates that price equality and stability did not always apply. This volume was part of one of the only editorial projects of this size in this field during the 'normalisation' era, and at the same time offered the most concise illustrated history of art available to local readers in decades. Purchasing the complete series of all ten volumes of Pijoan's famous work, published gradually over the years from the 1970s to the 1980s, would have been a major investment in relation to average income. With ten volumes at an approximate price of 150 CSK per volume (the 10th volume was released in 1984 at a price of 165 CSK, i.e. about 5% of an average salary at that point), the entire series would have cost 1500 CSK, i.e. over half of the average monthly salary in the mid-1980s. For a university student with a monthly stipend of around 500 CSK, purchasing even one volume was pretty much out of the question. The relatively generous print run of 40 000 copies suggests that a considerable number of individuals and families must have been willing to spend money on this book, even though the price figures quoted here do not quite fit the image of the 'cheap books' so often fondly recalled after 1989. Such comparisons are of course shorthand. If one compares a Czech scholar with an approximate monthly income of 2500 in the 1970s buying a 400-page book by Bakhtin for 53 CSK to an average English academic buying Darnton's 400-page *The Forbidden Best-Sellers* at 12.99 GBP (the recommended price of a paperback copy in 1996), the story of 'cheap books' again appears in a different light. In purely Orwellian terms, 'cheap' books perhaps used to be equal, but some were simply more equal than the others.

⁴² For 1960 prices, see *Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1967* [Statistical Yearbook CSSR 1967], (Prague: SNTL-SVTL, 1967), 467–468; for 1975 prices, see *Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1980* (Prague: SNTL - Alfa, 1980), 262–264.

It was nonetheless mainly the rise of printing and paper costs and the gradual, though seemingly invisible, increase in book prices that signalled the collapse of the entire command-system cultural economy. It was also already noted that the Czech book 'transition' happened to coincide with a period of major increases in prices in the world paper market. During the early period of the transformation, between 1989 and 1990, that is, just when the local media were most actively mobilising the nation in the fight against 'the end of the Czech book' and of Czech culture generally, average book prices grew from 25–30 to 40 CSK (at that time approximately an equivalent of 0.50 to 0.80 GBP). The increase in book prices became more dynamic during 1992–1993, but the average price was still around 77 CSK by 1994, and it was not until the second half of the 1990s that the rise in book prices accelerated considerably. *Mirákl*, Josef Škvorecký's famous novel published in 1997, which sold for 200 CSK, may have been slightly higher priced because of its size (500 pages) and the author's popularity, but its price is an example of the considerable increase in prices that began occurring in the second half of the 1990s.

It may not be an accident that the rather rapid increase in book prices between 1996 and 1997 coincided almost exactly with a sharp drop in the real incomes of the population in 1996 – the first such drop since 1991. According to some economists, however, the actual consumption behaviour (i.e. buying cars, computers, etc.) of Czech population did not really follow the significant drop in real incomes as recorded in statistics, and the book market could be seen as further evidence of this.⁴³ For despite this combination of growing book prices and – at least according to the statistics – the limited purchasing power of the population, the production of titles continued to grow steadily throughout the given period. It can be assumed that unless the publishers wanted to commit economic suicide, they must have been able to sell an increasing number of books at these higher prices. No matter how relatively depressed the overall economic situation of the country was by the second half of the 1990s, it evidently did not prevent people from buying books.

⁴³ Analysts of the transitional decade also concluded that the entire post-1989 development period was least profitable for people in mid-level income categories, which would likely include most book-buyers. On the development and interpretation of real income figures in 1990–1997, see Jiří Večerník and Petr Matějů, *Zpráva o vývoji české společnosti 1988–1998* [A Report on the Development of Czech Society 1988–1998], (Prague: Academia, 1998), 124.

By the end of the post-revolutionary decade, books were approximately five times more expensive than they were in 1989/1990, while the price of most everyday items had risen 'only' threefold. Although greater wage differentiation means that the average nominal wage less reflects changes in individual incomes, according to statistics salaries have increased about fourfold since the early 1990s. If, for example, an average book price represented one percent of the monthly income more or less continually between the 1960s and the early 1990s, that percentage increased by the second half of the 1990s and then decreased slightly again by the end of the decade as nominal wages grew and book prices became relatively stagnant. In 2005, a book no longer cost the equivalent of a quarter kilo of butter, as might have been the case in the 1960s (though was no longer the case in the 1970s and the 1980s), but an academic book could still be bought for 1.5–2% of the average income (i.e. a percentage of income not so different from that in the 1970s), while in order to buy a new locally made Tesla TV set a person would have to work for just two weeks, and a new Škoda Fabia Combi car could have been purchased for 11 monthly incomes.⁴⁴

In the above-cited Budapest report on the book sector in Eastern Europe, the authors tried to calculate how long people needed to work in individual countries in order to be able to buy a book, and their figures put the local 'horror stories' about books after 1989 into yet another perspective. According to the report, Czechs and Hungarians had to work the least amount of time (2.5 hours) out of all the countries surveyed in former Eastern Europe in order to buy a book even in the year 2000. However, in the late 1990s, when Czech book prices had reached what could have been seen as the astronomical figures of hundreds of crowns, the media's preoccupation with expensive books and the consequent 'end of culture' began to slowly dry up.

While the media – and through them the voices of local intellectuals and book professionals – turned their attention away from 'expensive books', they nonetheless discovered a new target in a company called *Levné knihy* (Cheap Books), whose slightly junky-looking shops began popping up around the country. Selling messy piles of books at a fraction of their original price, in shops that looked more like warehouses

⁴⁴ For current car and TV prices, see, for example: <http://www.skoda-auto.com/cze/services/newcars/newcardetail.htm?id=122470> and <http://www.b-elektro.cz/televizni-prijimace/televizory-169/tesla/1333.html> (accessed 3 July 2007).

for laundry detergent, and in spaces that became crammed with pensioners and students filling their shopping baskets with books, became a rather popular sales method and turned into a good business, too. As with the issue of 'expensive' books some years earlier, the media's representation of the sale of cheap books was framed in the discourse of outrage. Even publishers themselves could not agree on their general evaluation of this business. As noted by the editor-in-chief of the intellectually oriented publishing house Lidové noviny, selling books at cheap prices "is certainly a pleasant thing for the customer and the seller, assuming this is his or her specialisation. It is, though, an *incredibly dangerous* phenomenon. A huge reduction in book prices blocks the market and the sale of new books"⁴⁵ (*italics mine*). Some saw *this business* as a welcome outlet for overestimated print runs, others talked about the further degradation of the profession and a major risk to the industry as a whole. Another argument used referred to unfair competition and the possible decline in turnover, particularly in the case of small publishers who could not afford to produce giant print runs.

What many of the participants and observers of the transitional book business shared throughout the 1990s was their apocalyptic vision, according to which the entire local book world was to collapse at any minute. The construction of a 'crisis' did not have to be grounded in a single concrete point. The potential source of 'collapse' was constantly being identified in various different issues, whether it was the overproduction of books, the lack of reliable information about the book market, book prices that were too high or too low, or the saturation of the book market. The perception and production of 'crisis' was less about book prices as such but rather about the *expectations* imposed on the installation of the supposedly almighty 'free market'. The 'crisis' was not even purely about economic issues, let alone about books. What was at stake was the re-definition of the very notion of investments, during a period when the notions of cultural, intellectual and emotional capital also had to be re-defined along with social preferences and values. Books became one of many items (though one still highly valued) among the many new (more or less

⁴⁵ Markéta Vavřincová, "Proč jsou knihy drahé?" [Why Are Books Expensive?], *Lidové noviny*, supplement *Knihy a my* [Books and Us], (10 May 1995): 2. Interview with Eva Plešková, editor-in-chief of Lidové noviny Publishers.

cultural) consumption opportunities, the abundance of which began to exceed anything previously imaginable. A book, and its price, became the crossroads where a variety of cultural traditions and psychologically grounded stereotypes and expectations clashed with the economic, political and social currents of the 'post-revolutionary' period.

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

Many aspects of the 'revolutionary' development of the book world are missing from the picture portrayed here. It is a world that, though small in size, occupies a specific position in the local cultural and discursive tradition, but also, given the figures on the frequency of reading or books produced per capita, it is certainly far from invisible in the European book landscape. The many institutions connected with books, like libraries, literary journals, the training and education of editors, publishers, printers, and bookmakers, and more detailed analyses of readership itself would have to be discussed at greater length in order to complete the picture of the book 'revolution' and its aftermath. The limited resources available for such research, and the absence of any large-scale surveys on reading during the transformation period, means that the account presented in this book is necessarily incomplete. By looking at books and people in one small country in the context of the rise and fall of the command system of book production and reception, I have tried to offer a picture of some of the main themes, motives, and discourses that shaped various forms of representation (in both public and professional settings) of what can be regarded as one of the most fascinating transformations in the contemporary European history of communication.

There are still many questions to be asked, including some very basic ones, such as "do books make revolutions"? Darnton suggests that an affirmative answer to this question "seems to assume a linear notion of causality, as if one can argue from the sale of a book to its reading, the convictions of the readers, the mobilization of public opinion, and the engagement of the public in revolutionary action."¹ Following a case study of one book scene, I would agree with Darnton that, not only is it difficult to know enough about how readers actually respond to books under any regime, but also books in themselves may actually not be able to cause revolutions. Nonetheless, the way in which a certain

¹ R. Darnton (1996), 181. Darnton adopted this question from Roger Chartier's work but emphasised that his intention was not to imply that Chartier takes a simplistic notion of ideology and revolution but rather to use the question in order to challenge such notions. See note 1. for Chapter 7, 416.

community *appropriates* printed texts (to use Chartier's term, which I do not use just in relation to reading and the perception of meanings in a text, but also in relation to the stories people tell about it) can mirror and co-shape revolutionary affairs. It is in this sense that the shifts in the development of printed matter that took place during the 1980s and the early 1990s echoed all the leading trends of the general transformation of post-socialist society. Moreover, as the analysis of the 'pre-revolutionary' command system of book production and reception tried to show, this specific book-related institutional space – with its warehouses overflowing with unwanted books, editors tired of constantly renegotiating manuscripts that at any point in the production process could unexpectedly disappear, the crowds queued out front of bookshops from 5 a.m. in order to get the books they wanted – both *articulated* and *anticipated* the ongoing erosion of the 'old regime' and signalled its collapse long before the Velvet Revolutionaries entered the streets of Prague.

After November 1989, the decentralisation and deregulation of the book-related institutional framework; the (unsuccessful) privatisation of the state publishing houses and the accompanying explosion of small independent publishers; the growing production of titles in smaller print runs; the disparity between the high production costs (in both absolute and relative terms) and the purchasing power of the local population; the lack of transparency in relations between authors, publishers, distributors, and booksellers: all of this corresponded to the more general tendencies in other socio-economic spheres of development after 1989; and all of it framed the public and individual discourse of 'chaos' and 'disaster'. While the first 'post-totalitarian' decade was marked by the *discontinuous* development of the book-related institutional infrastructure (or the 'communication circuit' as Darnton would put it), it seems particularly important to examine the *continuities* in people's daily actions and performances that facilitated the capacity of individual actors in the book scene to cope with the vagaries of the conditions that followed the revolution. These continuities tend to be eclipsed by the 'post-revolutionary' discourses of change and the 'new order'.

So what came after? Around the start of the new millennium, some things were still changing, while other things in the local book scene had become stable or more or less established. With some exceptions, such as subsidiary companies like MOBA (Bastei Lübbe), Egmont ČR (Egmont), C.H. Beck or Euromedia (Bertelsmann), and Reader's

Digest, local capital still dominates the book publishing market in the Czech Republic. A small but not insignificant number of independent publishers, who embarked on the business more as a hobby and a 'mission' than a source of income, continue to operate, despite growing competition from larger, more productive publishers. The book market has been further shaken by the successful spread of the discount book company *Levné knihy*, by the emergence of pirate publishing, the collapse of distribution companies, and publishers' questionable payment discipline, but the number of publishers has continued to grow – thirty new publishers emerged just between 2004 and 2006.² The floods in 2002 destroyed a substantial proportion of the stock of some publishers (Dvořák, Kořán). While in the second half of the 1990s production costs were beginning to approach the level of costs in West Europe (in absolute terms), the market pressured publishers to adapt book prices to the local monthly average income, which in 2000 was still equal to around 350 USD. Calls for the co-ordination and stabilisation of the book business, which had been emerging since the first half of 1990s, had intensified by the end of the decade, and not all went unheard. For example, individual publishing houses began to focus on particular genres and audiences, and a house without a definable 'trademark' had limited chances of surviving in the increasingly competitive market. Mergers of smaller units into larger and thus more powerful entities appeared in every sector, including publishing, book distribution, and sales. Respect for ISBN registration grew, as did the reputation of professional organisations and book fairs.

The list of 'problems' affecting the Czech book market issued by the Union of Czech Booksellers and Publishers was still quite long even a decade after the revolution. It included the continued undercapitalisation of the entire system, the growing competition between publishers, increasing number of titles on offer, and a further reduction of print runs. Booksellers were reluctant to stock books older than one year, and publishers who underestimated their marketing strategy faced the risk of their books never even reaching the stores let alone readers. Chain bookstores began opening up in the larger cities, like Prague and Brno, along with bookselling in supermarkets. The Union's report noted the relatively slow spread of the use of information technology in bookselling and distribution and a laxness surrounding the

² J. Halada (2007), 19.

terms and dates of payment, something that was still a major cause of bankruptcies and secondary insolvency in the book business.³ Despite these issues, books continued to be published and sold in relatively high numbers compared to the previous era and compared to the rest of the world. And according to recent research, the same strong trend is also observed in reading: although over one-half of respondents in a survey of reading noted it was impossible to keep abreast of everything new in the publishing market, 80% of Czechs aged 15 and over claimed to have read at least one book a year, while on average the local population read 16 books a year; 23% claimed that they read several times a week; and 71% said they bought at least one book a year, while on average Czechs buy 6.6 books a year.⁴

But if books in themselves do not make revolutions, what do revolutions do to books and their readers? Assuming that the objective of the Communists' cultural policy was to bridge the gap between the 'elite' and the 'common' reader by putting books in 'the hands of people', did the 'post-communist transformation' demolish this bridge? Such questions are just as simplistic and causality-driven as the one challenged by Darnton. What the above analyses seem to suggest is that, at least in Czechoslovakia, the command culture never fully built this bridge in the first place, because quite a few bridges between books and readers already existed when the Communists came to power. Also, the binary opposition between 'mass' and 'elite' culture does not seem to be the right tool with which to analyse any contemporary socio-cultural environment, let alone the 'totalitarian' and 'post-totalitarian' environments. Though anecdotal evidence may not be enough to support this argument, it may generate some further questions. For example, in 2005, 16 years after the collapse of the 'old regime', a book of memoirs written by the retired Czech ex-prime minister Miloš Zeman sold 160 000 copies within just the first few weeks after its release.⁵

³ See Jaroslav Císař, "Základní fakta o produkci knih v ČR za rok 2001," [Basic Facts about the Production of Books in the CR during the Year 2001], in www.sckn.cz (accessed 23 April 2007).

⁴ Based on statistical data acquired in a research project conducted by the Institute of Czech Literature – Academy of Science of the Czech Republic and the National Library, Prague with a representative sample of 1,551 anonymous respondents during May – June 2007. See Jiří Trávníček, *Čteme? Obyvatelé české republiky a jejich vztah ke knize* [Do we Read? Czech Citizens and their Attitude to the Book], (Brno: Host, 2008).

⁵ Miloš Zeman, *Jak jsem se mýlil v politice* [How I was Mistaken in Politics], (Prague: Ottovo nakladatelství, 2005). The recommended price was 255 CSK, which matched the average book prices of that time. This thick, hard-bound volume was

The media did not fail to note that sales of this hefty tome (all 350 pages and one pound of it), which was allegedly written over a few weeks, earned the author 4 million CSK (approx. 133 000 Euro), or about twenty times the local average annual income. Some critics suspected that to some extent it owed its success to its gossipy telling of “offensive juicy stories” about prominent politicians and to the aggressive promotional campaign that “hooked an audience nurtured on a tabloid style of reporting”.⁶ A similar type of bestseller ‘reality-literature’ had scored well on the book market before, especially volumes devoted to rumours about the former president Václav Havel and his second wife. The commercial success of such books could certainly be an indicator of the return of the ‘common reader’.⁷ But even harsh opponents of Zeman’s book and political views admitted that, from the purely professional perspective of political science, the book provided a competent testimony on the functioning of the ‘old regime’ and of the events that followed its collapse, including his own unsuccessful presidential campaign. The ‘common reader’ may have skipped the technical passages, but the book nonetheless offered less sensational content than one would have expected from a work bought by hundreds of thousands of readers.

To take another example, in 2000, as a part of publishing series called ‘Books that Changed the World’, which included *The Communist Manifesto*, Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, and the US *Declaration of Independence*, a young publisher named Michal Zítko published Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which produced outrage across the nation (via the media). The publisher was immediately accused of promoting extremist nationalist groups (skinheads) and of hunting for a profit, but he defended himself with almost the enlightenment-style argument that all he wanted to do by releasing this text was “to know his enemy, to know totality and how it works, to know stupidity and its

especially visible due to the shiny white cover page that featured a detailed coloured photograph of the author’s face and the title printed in red and blue letters, i.e. the colours of Czech flag.

⁶ All quotations from Ladislav Verecký, “Napišu vám trháč,” [I’ll Write you Bestseller], *Magazín Dnes*, (21 April 2005), 15.

⁷ See Přemysl Svara, *Sedm týdnů, které otřásl Hradem* [The Seven Days that Shook the Castle], (Prague: Přemysl Svara, 1998); and Miloš Rýc, *Zpověď tajemníka: ve službách Dagmar Havlové a Václava Havla* [The Testimony of a Secretary: In the Service of Dagmar Havlová and Václav Havel], (Prague: Rybka, 1999). The release of both books was followed by intense media attention and each of them sold in over 200 000 copies.

representations...".⁸ The case ended up in court, where Zítko was charged with the crime of 'supporting and propagating movements intended at suppressing the rights and freedoms of citizens'. In the first instance the publisher received a suspended sentence of three years, plus a fine of 2 million CSK. After five years of legal battles the Supreme Court finally cleared him of all charges in the spring of 2005, but he could no longer run his publishing business. Despite his legal triumph, he lost millions, for the police confiscated several thousands of copies of the book when he was first charged. In the meantime, owing to changes in international copyright legislation, the rights to publish the infamous title were no longer available for free, and reprint and distribution was now subject to the approval of the copyright owner, which is the Bavarian government.

Anecdotes and juicy book stories may help illustrate the 'revolutionary' context and its aftermath and may even amuse, but, given the disruptive and often confusing nature of that period, what seems particularly difficult is providing a statistically and conceptually accurate picture of it. To examine these stories through the established categories of 'common' or 'elite' culture is just as difficult as dealing with such seemingly simple issues as monitoring the rapid growth of books and their publishers since November 1989. What may be even more important than having accurate empirical data and the perfect conceptual apparatus with which to interpret them is the irrefutable fact that immediately after the Velvet Revolution a relatively large (no matter how imperfectly calculated) number of (no matter how imperfectly defined) subjects expressed the intention to produce printed matter, and that the book buyers were willing to buy out clearly oversized print runs in the range of hundreds of thousands of copies.

⁸ Petr Žantovský, "Chci znát své nepřátele," [I Want to Know my Enemies], an interview with the publisher Michal Zítko, *MF Plus*, No. 13, (2005): 42–44. In an interview for *Britské listy* Zítko noted that the entire public paranoia concerning the book was exploded essentially by one statement of a highly popular politician (a Social Democrat) who in his review (published one day after the release of the book) noted that the publisher of such a text should be imprisoned. What followed was an avalanche of media attention, he had to even set up a press centre in order to provide interviews for international media. In his view, despite violating major principles of free speech, this media attack on a "right-wing extremism" was carefully timed and orchestrated in order to generate solid political capital for the new Social Democratic Prime Minister. See Michal Zítko, "Knihy se pronásledovat nemají," [Books Should not be Persecuted], an interview conducted by Filip Sklenář, *Britské listy*, (18 January 2005), in <http://www.blisty.cz/2005/1/18/art21563.html> (accessed 30 June 2007).

Many individuals recognised, used, and also misused the opportunity for virtually *anyone* to become involved in the production, distribution, and reception of the (printed) word. Whether they were motivated by – largely naïve – expectations of a quick profit or the – equally naïve – mission of “enlightening the (finally) liberated nation”, or both, independent publishing expanded the understanding of an individual’s personal and social limits and re-defined what a person can do with his or her (not just cultural) life. Though it could be argued that the late 20th century can no longer be seen as an era of the supremacy of the printed word, and that – at least in the context of the post-socialist states – the increasingly aggressive invasion of other means of mass communication into people’s mental space occurred simultaneously with the ‘paper revolution’, it was (among other things) the widened access to publishing (still without e-book during the early transition era!) that subsequently shaped people’s perceptions of and involvement in the ‘new’ social order.

In the unique circumstances of the revolution and its aftermath, the social power of books was redefined in the sense that it came to mean more than just the subversive potential of unorthodox content, disseminated through the suddenly readily available ‘uncensored’ titles. An independently released book – whether a cookbook, a collection of Havel’s essays, an erotic novel, or even the controversial release of *Mein Kampf* – operated as a force that fundamentally expanded the notion of what was socially imaginable, possible, and, indeed, acceptable. The agonizing over the ‘end of the book’ that filled the pages of the print media and surfaced in discussions among book professionals shortly after November 1989 was not a reaction to the ‘revolution in print’ as such. It was yet more evidence of the *continuity* of meanings and performances instituted during the previous era, and it reflected an attempt to stick to the notion of a book defined as a (hard-bound, illustrated, widely accessible ‘cheap’ etc.) form of “high-quality national property”, a notion that was established even before the Communists began managing culture.

The *book* as a potential social force both lost out and gained during the post-Cold War transformation. It lost out in the sense that it relinquished its privileged post as a key communicator of national desires and frustrations, protected from market ‘prostitution’. But it gained in other ways. If Darnton’s forbidden bestsellers of pre-revolutionary France polarised views and forced the public to take sides and see issues in radical black and white terms, the boom in the number and

variety of titles available in much of post-socialist Eastern Europe, and not just in the Czech lands, seems almost to have sent the public in the opposite direction.⁹ The multiplication of genres, styles, material formats, and socio-economic meanings that the notion of a book began to embrace during the early 1990s actually contributed to the collapse of absolutistic and simplified distinctions of either/or and us or them, distinctions that the 'old regime' controlled by the Communists may not have invented but certainly reinforced. What also collapsed was the idea that any subject, be it an individual or a collective entity, has the right to make decisions about what is produced, reproduced, sold, and read. In this way, even a cookbook had its place in the reconstitution of what, in the classical terms of political theory, could be called the public sphere and civil society. Even a slim Harlequin paperback on a street vendor's portable table has a story to tell about the links between different socio-cultural environments, whether we refer to them as 'post-totalitarian', 'late-capitalist', or 'post-modern'.

⁹ R. Darnton (1996), 246.

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